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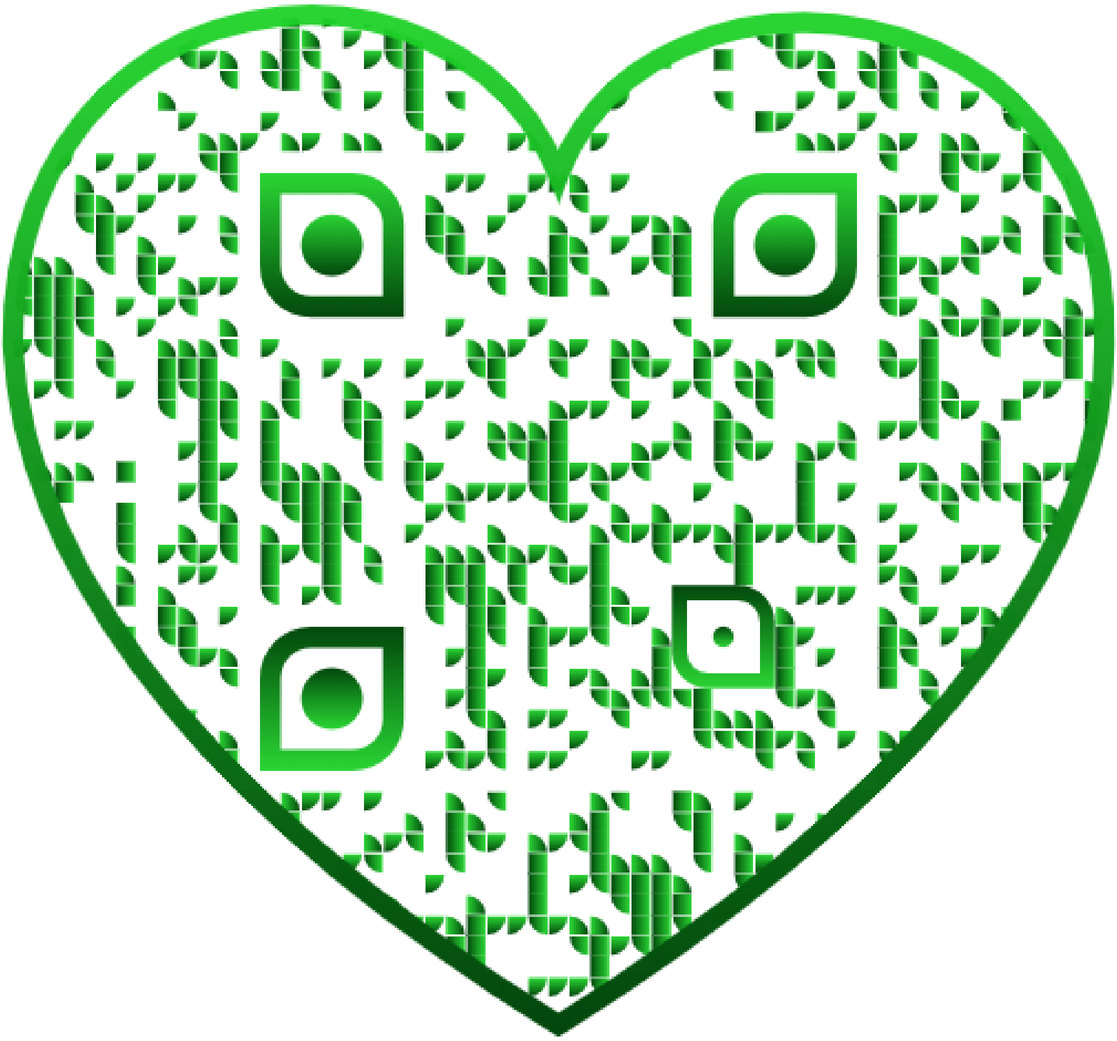

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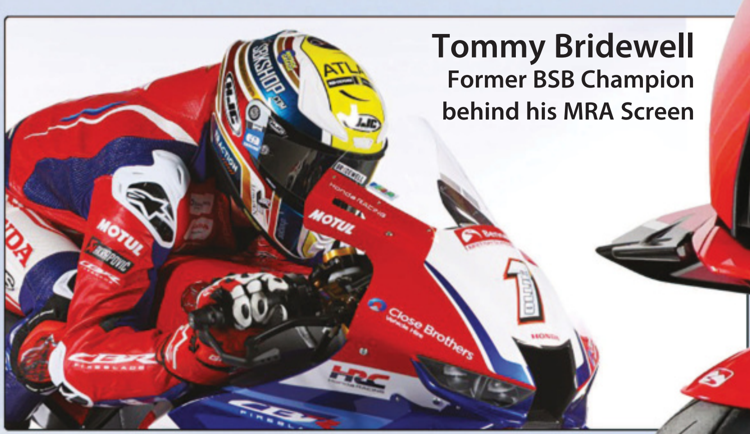

Tommy Bridewell
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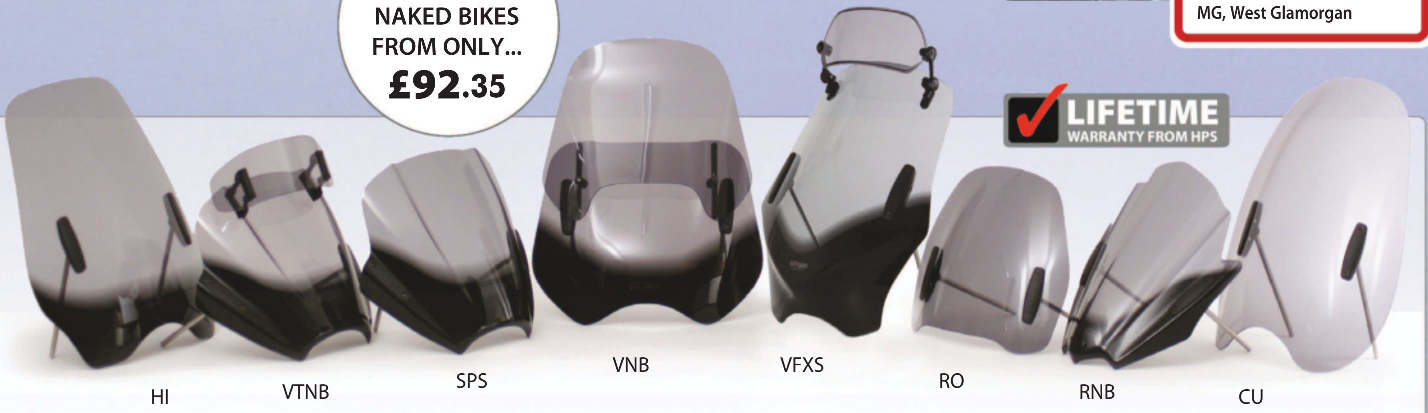

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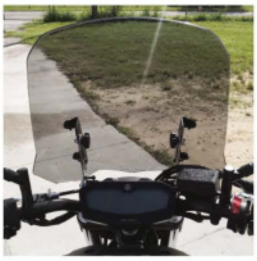

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‘There’s more than one way to skin the sports-touring cat’

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TrialGP returns to Britain after seven years away

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Italian adjective a bit cliché? Oh well – it’s bellissimo

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Bike
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Hello

A 1000-mile road trip to ride Spa? It's the sports-touring dream...

PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL BRYANT

The sports-touring dream goes a bit like this: jam just enough T-shirts and pants into a tailpack; ride a long way while excitement builds; hop off feeling fresh as a daisy; tear around the twisties like a banshee; cruise back home in a state of post-euphoric bliss.

My sports-touring highlight (thanks for asking) came while making *Bike*'s 400th issue. A motley crew leaves Peterborough in the morning, pausing late afternoon somewhere in east Belgium. The next day I'm plunging downhill through standing water towards the iconic Eau Rouge at Spa-Francorchamps on a Honda VFR800. Except for five wide-eyed Brits, everyone else is riding track bikes on race wets.

Between sessions we shiver in the pits, hunker round space heaters and wring out sodden gloves. On track the VFR feels uncrashable. When the final flag falls we strap tailpacks back on ahead of a 225-mile return ride to our evening ferry.

Now, 233 magazines later, a few things have changed – Honda no longer makes a VFR – but the sports-touring dream endures, just as it has for half a century. Simon Hargreaves' celebration of the standout models starts on page 42. Today the VFR's baton has passed to Kawasaki's Ninja 1100SX, Yamaha's Tracer 9 GT+ (p34) and BMW's R1300RS (p42), which all offer their own take on sports-touring.

Someone else who's enjoyed riding a Honda VFR at Spa is British Superbike champion Kyle Ryde. The story of how he found himself aboard Team *Bike*'s 1989 RC30 racing against a grid of modern superbikes this month has to be read to be believed – it all starts on page 100.

Whether you enjoy riding far, fast or a bit of both, I hope you enjoy the issue.

Martin Fitz-Gibbons
Editor

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Team Bike

This magazine is made by the most talented team of bike journalists, writers and photographers in the universe. Here's what they've been doing this month.

Tech

Less is more or more for less?

1

Jamie Turner

For almost all of their 140-year existence, motorcycles have become more powerful as time has passed. But recently a few key bikes have arrived with fewer horses than their predecessor. Prof Jamie explains all.

Less is more or more for less? – p22

Half a century of sports-touring

2

Simon Hargreaves

In the Venn diagram intersection between big miles and big miles per hour sits Simon Hargreaves. No one is better placed to write the complete history of landmark sports-touring bikes.

Half a century of sports-touring – p42

'Liberty want to invest in MotoGP to bring it to more people'

Oxley interview

3

Mat Oxley

The world's premier motorcycle racing series finds itself at a crossroads, trying to increase its popularity without affecting its credibility. Where does MotoGP go? Mat tracks down the man with the plan.

Dan Rossomondo interview – p62

4

Greg Moss

This month Greg found himself perched precariously up a sheer drop for TrialGP's return to Britain. 'One of the sketchiest sports I've ever photographed,' he says. 'Wish I'd brought a climbing harness!'

Inside TrialGP – p69

Adventure

La dolce vita

5

Jeff Buchanan

A motorcycle journalist for 24 years, editor-at-large for US mag *RoadRUNNER* and an AMA Motocross mechanic for Team Maico in 1982, Jeff's done it all. Now 'it all' includes the Motogiro d'Italia.

La dolce vita – p78

Ryde of a lifetime

6

Kyle Ryde

The same Kyle Ryde who's the reigning, defending British Superbike champion. This month Team *Bike* asked if he'd like to race an old RC30 at Spa against a grid of modern superbikes. Kyle said yes…

Ryde of a lifetime – p100

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5 BIKES THAT REALLY MATTER THIS MONTH

Roomier and more relaxed to ride

Prototype didn't have all the rider aids

SECRET CHASSIS We understand the 950's frame, single-sided swingarm, suspension and brakes are all new, but MV won't reveal specifics yet. Suspension feels soft to the point of plush.

[**EXCLUSIVE**]

Brutale, but less brutal

The 2026 **MV Agusta Brutale 950** promises practicality as well as performance – and we've ridden a prototype

Finally free of its short-lived association with KTM, a refreshed MV Agusta is promising much new-model excitement for 2026. Not least is this: a new Brutale powered by the 931cc inline triple from the Enduro Veloce. If it blends that motor's gutsy, useable feel with the Brutale 800RR's looks and adds in some compliant suspension, it could be a genuinely brilliant naked.

Bike contributor Adam Child recently spent a day riding a pair of Brutale 950 prototypes, and while he was kept at arm's length from anything as useful as a spec sheet – or indeed a definite name for the bike – his ride revealed MV are indeed taking their naked range in a more relaxed, road-focused direction.

'Rider aids weren't finalised on the development mules I rode, so I only had one rough engine map and no ABS. But what's immediately clear is that the new Brutale feels much roomier and more civilised than the existing 800RR. The seat is more cushioned, while the distance between the pegs, seat and wider bars is larger. This new 950 rides less like a track animal and much more like a purpose-built roadster.

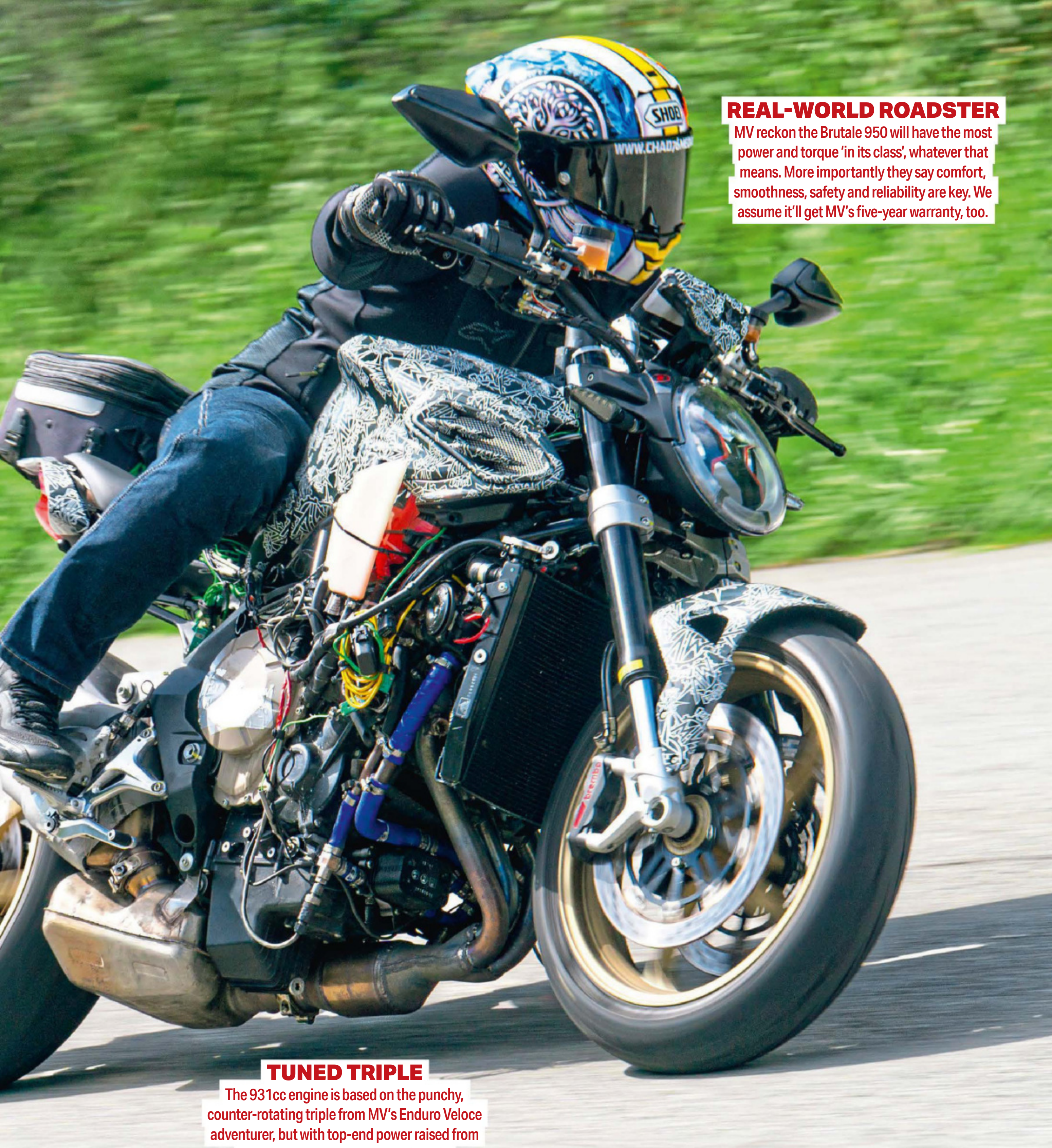
'The engine is smoother too, though the three-exit exhaust still sounds as evocative as ever. It's also really clear that the 950 has a lot more low-down torque. The Brutale 800 peaks high in the revs, but this prototype drives beautifully from 3000rpm to 6000rpm. Rev hard and there's perhaps 140bhp up top.

'Less than five per cent of the 800's rolling chassis has been carried over to the new bike. Steering isn't quite as sharp, and the suspension is softer with more low-speed feedback – it feels very different from the uncompromising 800RR, which works best ridden hard. The 950 feels much more user friendly.

'There are still lots of unanswered questions, including price. I'd predict something around the current £14,900 of the 800RR.'

Expect the Brutale 950 to be revealed officially in November.

PHOTOGRAPHY MARCO CAMPELLI / MV AGUSTA



REAL-WORLD ROADSTER

MV reckon the Brutale 950 will have the most power and torque 'in its class', whatever that means. More importantly they say comfort, smoothness, safety and reliability are key. We assume it'll get MV's five-year warranty, too.

TUNED TRIPLE

The 931cc engine is based on the punchy, counter-rotating triple from MV's Enduro Veloce adventurer, but with top-end power raised from 122bhp to an estimated 140bhp-ish.

'We have to move away from luxury'

» Luca Martin is the CEO at MV Agusta – a role he retained after the Italian firm was separated from Pierer/KTM ownership this year. We asked him about MV's future.

'For a couple of years MV Agusta has been seen as the cherry on top of the cake, while the cake itself was the big KTM conglomerate,' he says. 'Now we want to bake our own cake. That means that our future motorcycles are specifically built for motorcyclists and that we have to move a little bit away from this concept of luxury. We want to see our motorcycles on the road.

'And that, I would say, is a change from how MV Agusta was perceived from within the KTM group.'

Martin: still boss after KTM's exit

Titter ye not

New **Honda WN7** electric bike isn't as mad as some would have you believe. For sensible two-wheeled japes, it makes total sense

It's tempting to scoff at Honda's first big electric bike because there are no breakthroughs with range (81 miles), price (£12,999) or peak power (67bhp).

But consider this: one of Honda's best-selling models is the NC750X DCT, a sensible twist-and-go commuter that weighs more than the WN7, makes less power, has a lot less torque and costs far more to maintain and run.

Okay, so the NC750 is £4600 less to buy and has more than twice the range, but if the WN7 lands with a tasty PCP finance deal, that could swing a few buyers. After all, the WN7's CCS fast charging system takes it from 20 to 80 per cent in just 30 minutes, which means occasional longer trips are not out of the question if you take extended coffee breaks.

And Honda are very serious about selling the WN7, rather than just using it to flaunt their green credentials to legislators. One senior Honda UK manager told *Bike* that when the WN7 arrives in spring it'll be available in every mainland dealership, with technicians currently being trained to service it. That's a very different approach to Harley-Davidson with their LiveWire, which was only stocked in nine dealerships.

'I'm a bit disappointed because it's still quite heavy, which is a problem for a commuter – it's not going to be nimble,' says Aman Surana, an electric motorcycle expert who helped set up Norton's electric bike project and now works in F1.

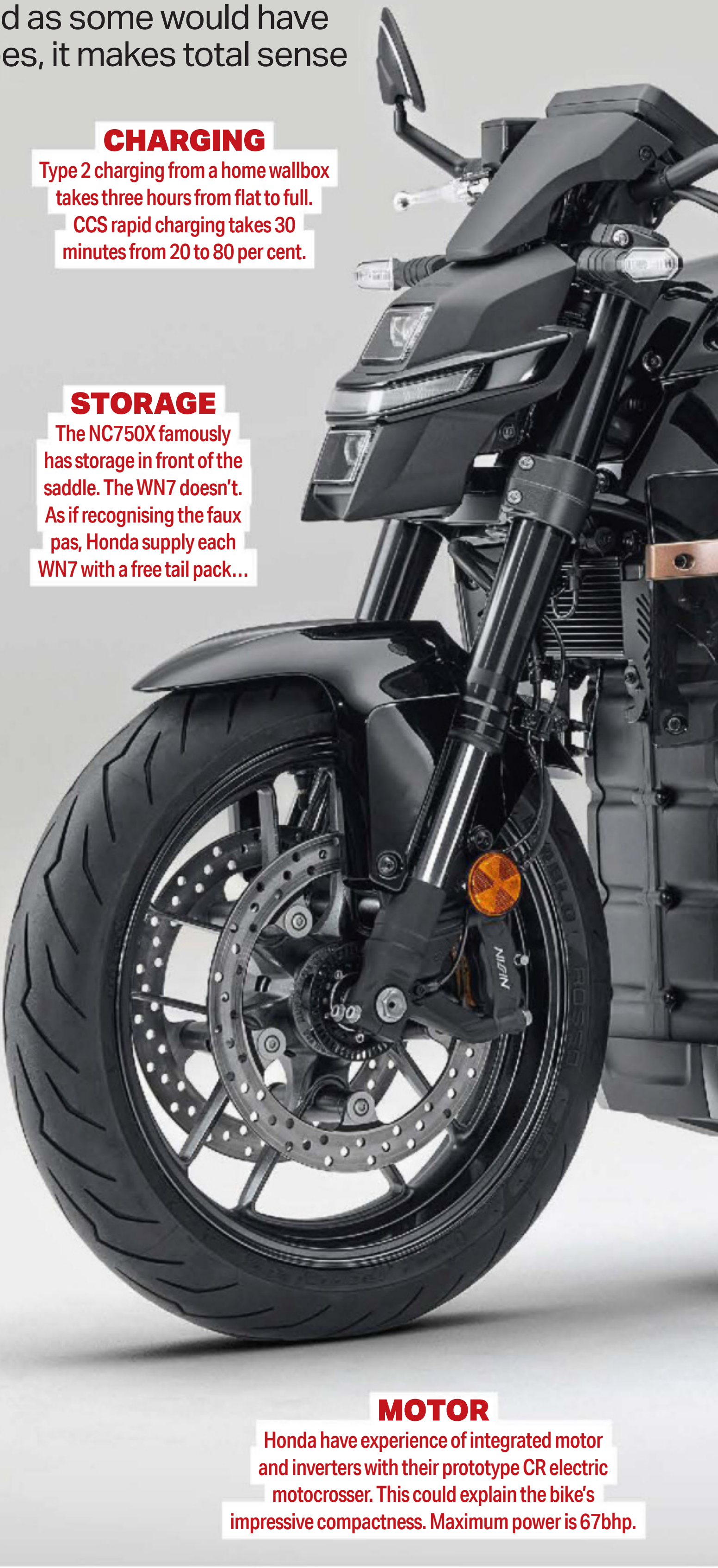
'But it looks much smaller than direct rivals. It's an impressively compact package because it has all the same things as a bike like the LiveWire – CCS, a big battery – yet looks much smaller.'

Honda have revealed few technical details about the motor, inverter or battery, but Aman reckons they look fairly standard. 'There don't seem to be any breakthroughs,' he says. 'I would expect the motor and inverter to be liquid-cooled – you can see a radiator under the headstock – and that the battery is air-cooled. The voltage will probably be 400-500V because CCS doesn't operate below that.

'They don't specify how the range was calculated, so there's a chance it's more impressive than it looks – if it was 81 miles at 70mph, for example, that would make the bike far more attractive. But I expect it's a WMTC [World Motorcycle Test Cycle, the standardised test for range] figure.'

And the styling? 'The boxy looks are normal for an electric bike trying to hit a price point. If you want to make the battery easy to manufacture, it has to be that shape. To make it a funky aerodynamic shape, you'd be looking at an overall price of £20,000, which I doubt would work very well...'

> **'Honda are very serious about selling the WN7'**



CHARGING
Type 2 charging from a home wallbox takes three hours from flat to full. CCS rapid charging takes 30 minutes from 20 to 80 per cent.

STORAGE
The NC750X famously has storage in front of the saddle. The WN7 doesn't. As if recognising the faux pas, Honda supply each WN7 with a free tail pack...

MOTOR
Honda have experience of integrated motor and inverters with their prototype CR electric motocrosser. This could explain the bike's impressive compactness. Maximum power is 67bhp.

PHOTOGRAPHY HONDA

Not fat then

Comes with normal and CCS charging

ELECTRONICS

A mix of usual stuff, such as cruise control and modes, with electric cleverness – the + and - buttons on the left bar almost certainly adjust regenerative braking levels. Is 'R' button reverse? Hope so…

BATTERY

Honda have yet to reveal the capacity. Given the claimed range and top speed of 'over 110kmh' (69mph), we estimate it to be about 10kWh.

How they compare

	Honda WN7	Zero S	LiveWire S2 DM	Honda NC750X DCT
Price	£12,999	£15,515	£8,799 (offer)	£8399
Peak power	67bhp	60bhp	84bhp	58bhp
Range	81 miles	101 miles	69 miles	200 miles
Charge (20-80%)	30 mins	2.5 hours	78 mins	2 mins
Weight	217kg	223kg	198kg	226kg

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NEC Birmingham

motorcyclelive.co.uk

FANCINESS
New dash animation, numbered inscriptions, carbon everything and etched RS keyfob help prove you've spent a lot of money.

Marc Márquez: couldn't locate the footpegs

Is it just us or is that a 1970s electric fireplace?

WHEELS
Gorgeous forged rims are unique to the RS.

ENGINE
1103cc Ducati Desmosedici Stradale engine replaces the standard Diavel's 1158cc unit. Power goes up by 12bhp, but valve clearance adjustment intervals drop from 37,500 miles to 18,750.

[NEW BIKES]

0-62 in 2.52sec

Spotted a new **Diavel V4 RS** at the traffic lights? Best leave them to it

Fearful that a Diavel V4 owner might get tonked by a Hayabusa or V-Max in a traffic-light duel, Ducati have released an RS version fitted with a 180bhp Panigale V4 engine complete with desmodromic valve actuation (whereas the standard 166bhp bike uses humble poppet valves).

Ducati have done far more than just bolt in a Panigale engine, though. The gearing is lowered for even hairier acceleration, there's a high-flow air filter and dry clutch, plus lashings of carbon fibre that help drop the overall weight by 3kg to 220kg.

Ducati say the combination of those changes is enough for a certain Mr Marc Márquez to post a best 0-62mph time of 2.52sec on the RS. Brisk, then...

Ducati have also installed all the latest Panigale V4 electronics, so everything from the quickshifter to the wheelie and traction control is slicker and more sophisticated than the standard bike's. There are three power modes and four riding modes, one of which is Race.

The upgraded suspension is suitably trick too: at the front are 48mm Öhlins NIX30 forks and there's an Öhlins STX 46 shock at the back.

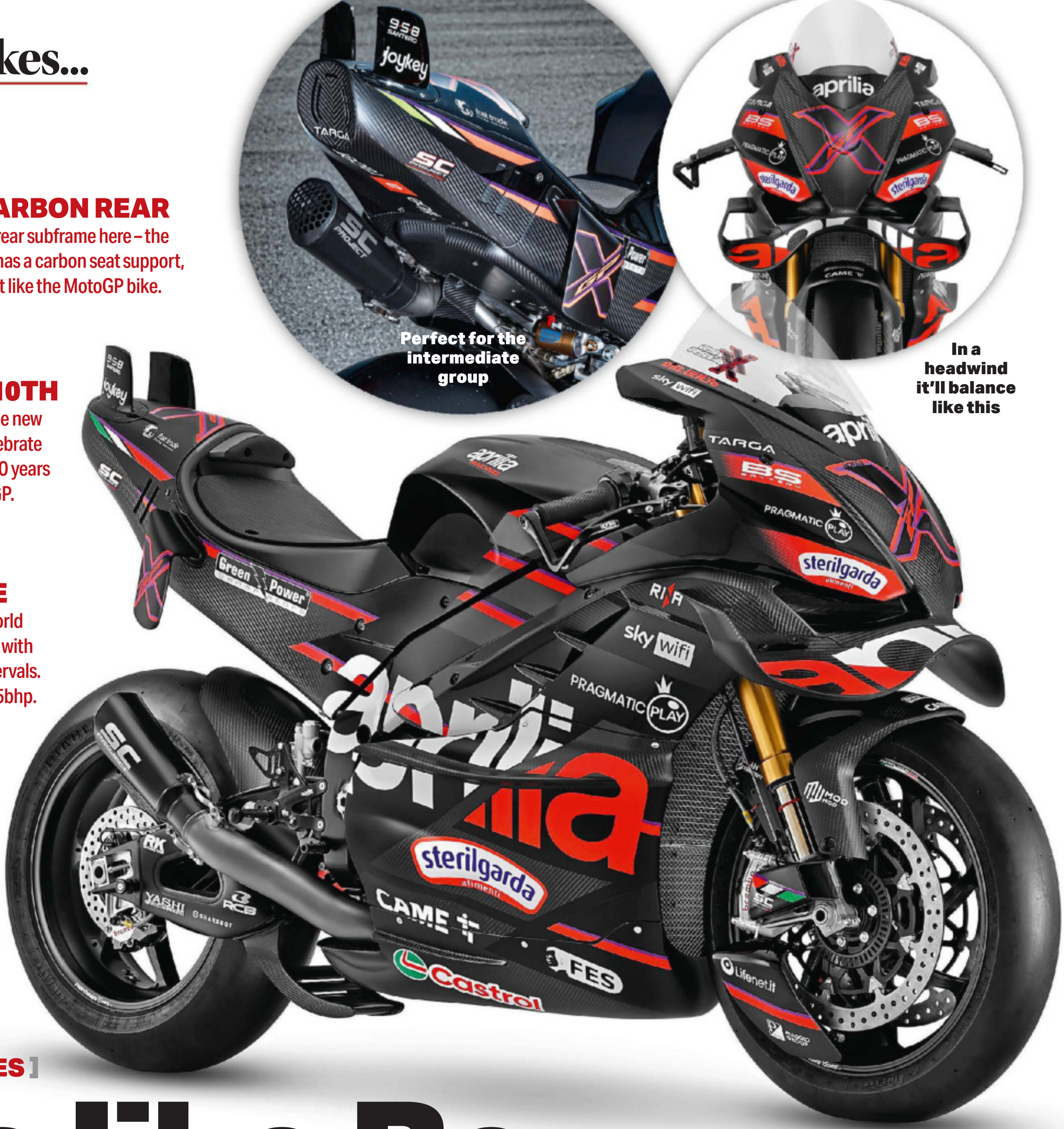
Inevitably the price accelerates almost as proficiently as the bike. The standard Diavel is £23,995; the RS rockets up to £34,395. It will be in showrooms towards the end of the year.

> 'The price accelerates as proficiently as the bike'

New Multistrada RS too

World's fastest tourer? Quite possibly. The new Multistrada RS gets the same 180bhp engine as the Diavel, plus the latest Öhlins Smart EC 2.0 semi-active suspension and Panigale V4 electronics. There's also the world's first titanium rear subframe, which Ducati say is designed to cope with a top box. Nice. Yours for £34,095.

PHOTOGRAPHY DUCATI



CARBON REAR
No rear subframe here – the X-GP has a carbon seat support, just like the MotoGP bike.

HAPPY 10TH
Aprilia say the new bike is to celebrate the RS-GP's 10 years in MotoGP.

ENGINE
Essentially a World Superbike motor with longer service intervals. Peak power is 235bhp.

Perfect for the intermediate group

In a headwind it'll balance like this

[NEW BIKES]

Be like Bez

Marco Bezzecchi has been hassling the Ducatis in MotoGP recently. Now you can buy the trackday version of his race bike - the **Aprilia RSV4 X-GP**

If your Ducati Panigale V4 R feels a little too understated for the Snetterton collecting area, here is the solution: Aprilia's new RSV4 X-GP, complete with the latest MotoGP aero and a 235bhp motor.

The track-only machine's rear end in particular looks remarkably like Marco Bezzecchi's factory Aprilia RS-GP25, with two 'tail wings' poking upwards and 'leg wings' (the downward protrusions sticking out of the tail that look perfect for hoicking it sideways so you can get to the lawnmower). Both were introduced to Bez's GP25 earlier this year.

> 'The X-GP generates five times the downforce in a straight line as the standard RSV4'

The rest of the fairing is equally wind-induced. The main fairing has ground effect bulges that suck the bike to the track at high lean angles, plus all the usual wings at the front. Aprilia say that compared to the normal RSV4, the X-GP generates five times the downforce in a straight line and three times the downforce when banked over. Just what we're lacking at Cadwell.

The 1099cc V4 is built by Aprilia's racing department. An increased compression ratio (Aprilia don't say how much), a racing air filter, new airbox intake trumpets and a titanium SC-Project exhaust boost peak power to 235bhp at 13,500rpm (redline: 14,100rpm). Combined with a claimed 'dry' weight of 165kg, that gives a power-to-weight ratio of 1.4 (that's 30 per cent higher than a BMW S1000RR). The ECU lets you fiddle with everything from power curves to engine braking in individual gears, has a built-in GPS so it knows which corner it's in, and comes with data acquisition and performance analysis software.

There are but two problems: firstly, it costs £93,000 (more than twice the price of the similarly nutso Ducati V4 R); secondly, only 30 are being built. To join the queue visit factoryworks.aprilia.com

PHOTOGRAPHY APRILIA

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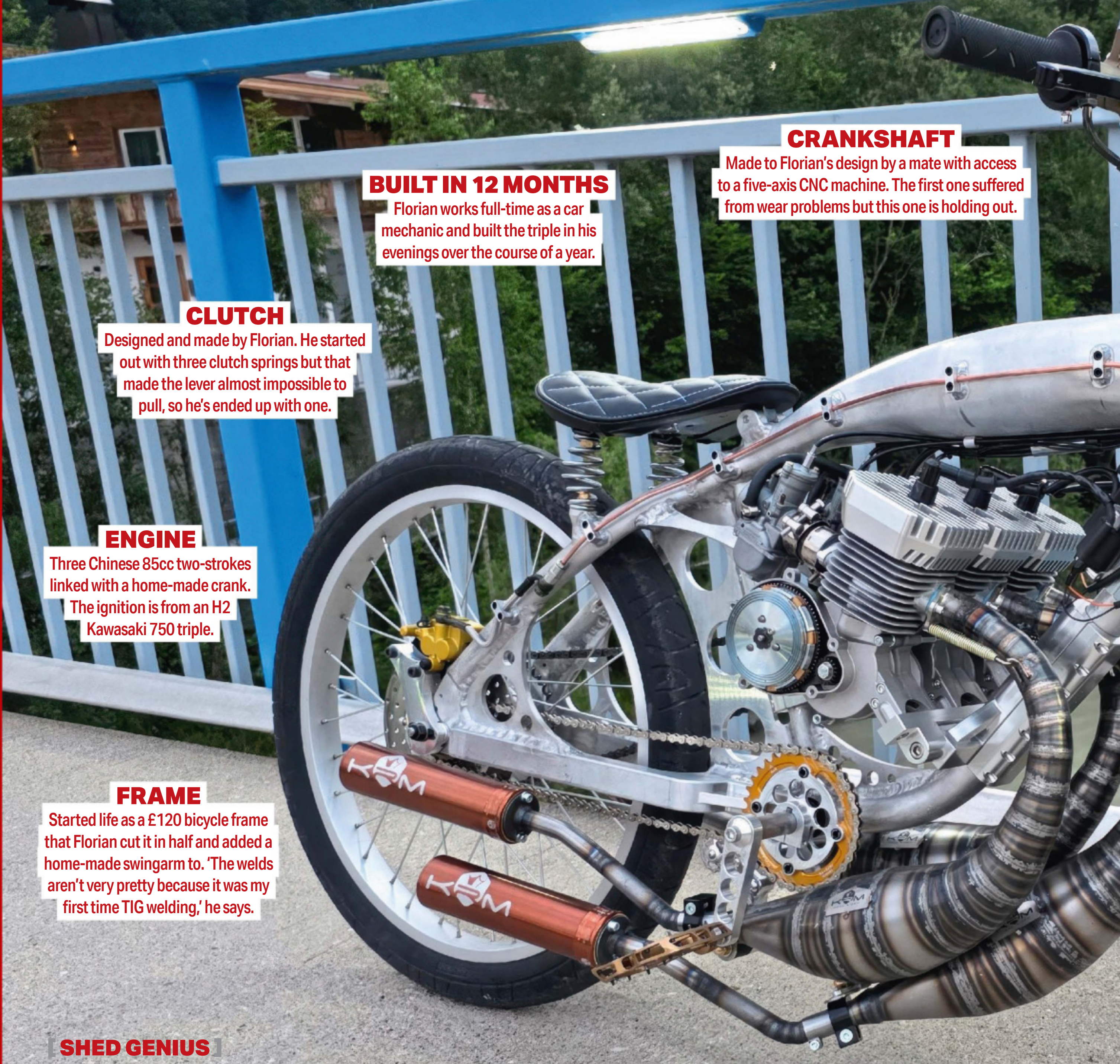


BUILT IN 12 MONTHS
Florian works full-time as a car mechanic and built the triple in his evenings over the course of a year.

CRANKSHAFT
Made to Florian's design by a mate with access to a five-axis CNC machine. The first one suffered from wear problems but this one is holding out.

CLUTCH
Designed and made by Florian. He started out with three clutch springs but that made the lever almost impossible to pull, so he's ended up with one.

ENGINE
Three Chinese 85cc two-strokes linked with a home-made crank. The ignition is from an H2 Kawasaki 750 triple.

FRAME
Started life as a £120 bicycle frame that Florian cut it in half and added a home-made swingarm to. 'The welds aren't very pretty because it was my first time TIG welding,' he says.

SHED GENIUS

'Ped antics'

Allen Millyard isn't the only ace engine builder. Florian Hauser has just completed his first home-made two-stroke triple, aged just 24…

If you don't recognise this 255cc engine, that's because it's the only one in existence: Austrian car mechanic Florian Hauser built it from three single-cylinder motors he bought online. And though he's been tuning mopeds since he was a kid, this is his first he's built from scratch.

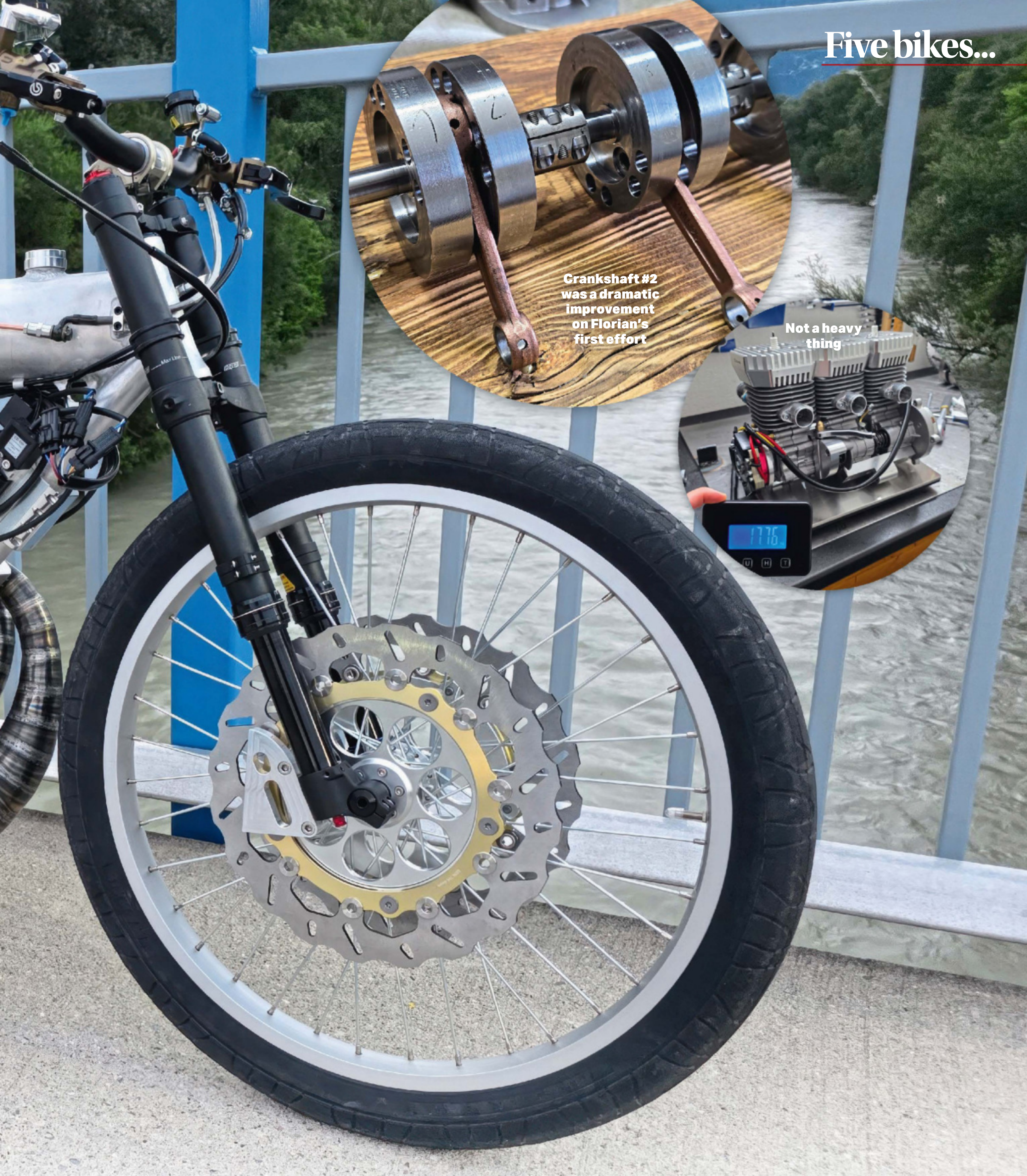
'Ever since I saw a three-cylinder Mobylette on YouTube I wanted to build a triple myself,' he tells *Bike* from his Austrian workshop. 'I found the base engines – Chinese-made Avenger 85s – on Amazon. Then I designed the crank and worked out the balancing factor [the amount the crank is out of balance, which will be evened out by the pistons and con rods – Ed].' As you do.

'I built the first crankshaft myself, but it didn't work out very well. I'd just bought my first lathe and there was so much play in the crank that I didn't even bother assembling the engine. It was obviously not going to work. Part of the problem was that I didn't know how to use the lathe properly, but as I made more and more parts for the engine, I learned.

'I also taught myself to use CAD during the process. Plus, of course, my technical understanding improved – I now know a lot more than I did at the beginning.'

For the second crank he roped in a friend who worked in a machine shop, and he made it on a five-axis CNC machine.

PHOTOGRAPHY FLORIAN HAUSER



Crankshaft #2 was a dramatic improvement on Florian's first effort

Not a heavy thing

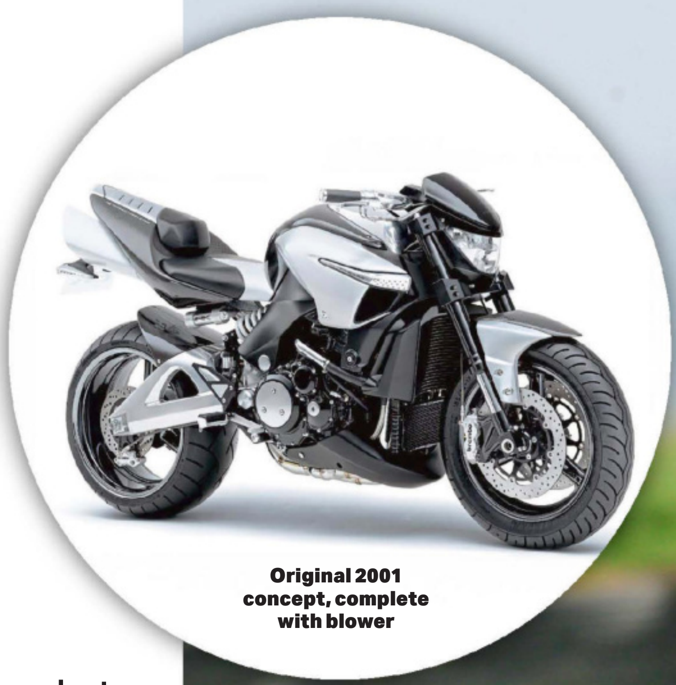
Florian then milled the engine cases in his home workshop so that they could be bolted together.

'After my friend made the billet crankshaft it was pretty straightforward to make the rest of the engine,' says Florian. 'It's just three engines that you join up. But the first test wasn't a success – the bike didn't start. I eventually figured out that the squish gap [the tiny clearance between the outer edge of the combustion chamber and the piston at top dead centre] was too big – it was 1.5mm. When I removed the head gasket to create a squish of 0.8mm the engine worked fine, so I machined the cylinder head down and refitted the head gasket.'

And then Florian set off on his first test ride. 'Because I assembled the whole bike without testing anything, I was quite nervous. I knew that theoretically the engine would run so I didn't bother testing it. And it did run, eventually, and that first ride was quite amazing. It's not very powerful – I think the exhaust is too big, or maybe I messed up the porting – so it's a nice cruiser. My other bike is an Aprilia RSV4 with 200bhp and it's less than that. But it works, so I'm happy.'

Florian is already planning his next project. 'I'm building a 1400cc two-stroke V-twin to run in a board-tracker. It's going to be amazing.' We don't doubt it.

2007 Suzuki B-King


Original 2001 concept, complete with blower

Concepts rarely reach production, but **Simon Hargreaves** recalls when Suzuki over-promised and under-delivered…

Photography **Chippy Wood**

Somewhere at Suzuki's Hamamatsu factory is a shed full of dusty, abandoned concept bikes. Over there, a 1985 hub-centre-steered Falcorustyco. In the corner, a 2005 inline-six Stratosphere. By the door, 2013's turbocharged Recursion parallel twin. None went into production because most concepts are design and engineering exercises – even those that run are only feasibility studies. Motorcycles aren't born from a start point of fantasy styling and spec wish lists, but boring practicalities. Like, can we build it using existing production methods? What will it cost for a hologram instead of clocks? How do we get foot-long axle scythes past construction-and-use regs?

Nevertheless, in October 2001 Suzuki tried the fantasy method when a naked muscle bike concept called the B-King appeared at the Tokyo Show. Its chassis was conventional, but brutal styling included a large pair of conical underseat cans and its 'spec' was dominated by a supercharged Hayabusa engine; 175bhp when normally aspirated, commentators landed on an arbitrary 240bhp. The B-King (B is for 'Boost', not a fast-food chain) turned up at more shows flanked by Suzuki staff gathering opinion. And the public liked it, mostly because of the supercharger.

Then Suzuki fell quiet; another concept bike destined for the dusty Hamamatsu shed. But in late 2006 a production B-King was revealed at the Paris Show, with a delayed UK launch a year later in August 2007 at Anglesey Circuit. Suzuki explained the lengthy development time as figuring out how to deliver the promised bike, but they omitted the thing that sold the B-King in the first place: the supercharger. You could argue – and Suzuki did – that 165bhp at the wheel and more than 80lb·ft of torque between 3000rpm and 10,500rpm was an acceptable alternative. And it was hugely entertaining on track, laying down black lines, grinding home-made titanium hero blobs and threatening to highside out of every turn. But the B-King was also surprisingly practical, demonstrated by a ride back to *Bike*'s Peterborough HQ; comfy, decent wind protection, easy handling.

But the public, dismayed by the lack of forced induction and embarrassed they ever admitted to liking it, turned away with a stifled cough. The B-King flopped and was discontinued after four years – two fewer than it took to develop it. Which is an interesting concept in itself… *Bike*

B-King goes
spar-king at
Anglesey in
August 2007

Jamie Turner
Professor of Engines at KAUST, two-stroke lover, BMW K1200S and Ducati Monster owner.

Less is more or more for less?

Professor **Jamie Turner** explains why peak horsepower numbers are sometimes falling despite engines getting bigger, smarter and newer

> ‘Horsepower per litre has actually fallen by 9%’

LIGHTLY STROKED

To turn the Ninja 1000SX into an 1100, Kawasaki increased the pistons’ stroke (the distance travelled up or down the cylinder) from 56mm to 59mm. Capacity increased 5.3 per cent – yet power fell by 4.3 per cent.

The engine powering Kawasaki's Ninja 1100SX (p34) throws up an interesting question. On the face of it, its evolution from the 1000SX doesn't look too clever. Adding 3mm of stroke and 5.4 per cent capacity to get a power loss of 6bhp really doesn't seem to stack up, even though it develops more torque (always good in the real world). In fact, you could view this as an unfortunate example of 'more is less', which marketeers really don't want to shout about.

But the fact the latest SX is so good to ride shows us something about product development: it's not all about the numbers. With, however, one notable exception – one that's probably at the root of why Kawasaki have done this.

There are different ways of balancing vehicle attributes in a motorcycle – power, torque, mass, that sort of thing. But the one immutable fact in all of automotive engineering is this: you cannot sell a vehicle that does not meet the prevailing emissions legislation. These are the numbers that cannot give. There is absolutely no leeway, and so when new emissions legislation comes in you have to expend engineering effort to meet it – whether you like it or not. If something else has to give to do so, then so be it.

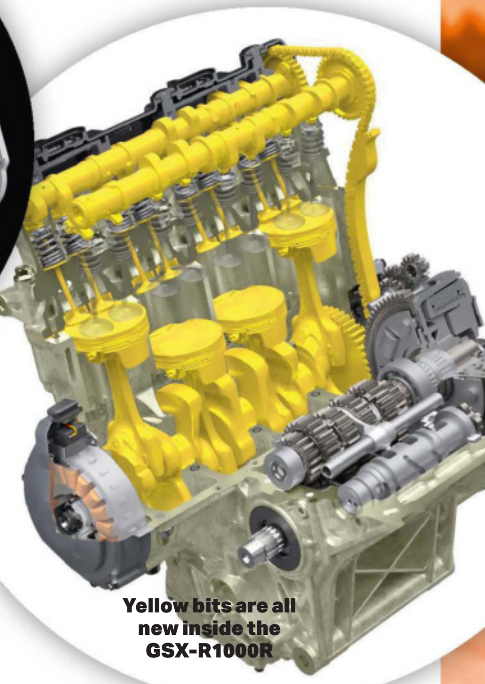
So, as Euro5+ for motorcycles rolled around, some bikes were launched with lower specific outputs (bhp/cc) than those they replaced. This phenomenon takes different forms – the Kawasaki has a bigger engine but less power; the 'new' Suzuki GSX-R1000R has lost 7bhp compared with the 2017 model (down from 199bhp to 192bhp). There is an argument for saying that both bikes represent a pragmatic way of meeting emissions regs. Given that you must emit cleanly, and you may have little in the way of product development cash, what do you do? The answer is as little as required. (I do not say this to provoke a reaction. The fact is that Kawasaki and Suzuki are the smallest of the Japanese manufacturers, it's a tough market out there, and they do, after all, want to make money.)

So the GSX-R appears to have largely the same engine as the previous model, now reworked to comply with Euro5+ and losing 3.5 per cent of its maximum power along the way. This is because, if you don't want or cannot afford to change much of the engine, you have to look at what else you can do. In extremis, you can adjust valve timing fairly readily and revisit calibration. You can possibly fit a more powerful management system to more finely calibrate spark and fuel timing, too. More computing power is usually an unavoidable requirement of a toughening of emissions regs – and Euro5+ requires increased on-board diagnostics.

Of these, valve timing adjustment will usually be in the direction of reducing overlap – the period when intake and exhaust valves are open together. Less overlap cuts the chance of unburned fuel passing through to the exhaust, improving emissions, but it also gives less potential to use gas dynamics to increase airflow at full load and especially the top end, harming power. Suzuki say they have reduced overlap while modifying the profiles as well, so that would explain the reduction in peak power. A similar tactic of reducing overlap was used when Suzuki recently resurrected their Hayabusa

Ninja 1100SX is 6bhp down on last year's 1000. Jamie explains why...

Ducati's new V2: 30bhp down on the Superquadro



Yellow bits are all new inside the GSX-R1000R

and DR-Z4 motors, and both of those featured trimmed power figures, too.

Suzuki have also increased the compression ratio, so the pistons have likely changed. But, you say, the GSX-R has variable valve timing (VVT), so why didn't they just tweak this to offset the power loss? Clearly, VVT would help no end in mitigating any compromise? Well, although the centrifugal phaser on the GSX-R1000R's intake cam is mechanically very simple and elegant, it also has effectively no electronic control at all, so you can't depend on it.

After this, stuff outside the core engine is easier and cheaper to change. Intake runners may have their diameter or length changed. The exhaust can be modified fairly readily, plus the catalyst loading can be adjusted – you might accept a higher precious metal loading there if, with the other mods, it improves emissions and means you don't have to alter much of the rest of the engine. As is apparent, I hope, it's all a big trade-off.

After this sort of thing, the ease-of-doing-it list probably runs like this. First change the injectors and targeting (you may do this with the ECU change). Then tweak the intake port geometry to start modifying in-cylinder air motion to improve combustion. After that, you start changing more expensive stuff such as the combustion chamber (which will require changes to the cylinder head, one of the most costly components in the engine). And the further down this list you go, the more durability revalidation work you'll have to do. It all mounts up.

So, you can see why bean counters will start questioning why you desperately need to try to hold power outputs if it's going to cost a pile more cash. This is especially the case when you have outputs way higher than most mortals can employ without the sort of 'hand of God' electronic rider aids we have now.

Kawasaki have taken the approach that they'll expend a bit more cash to hold power close to what it was before, but their horsepower-per-litre has actually fallen by nine per cent (far more than for the Suzuki). Bumping stroke by 3mm takes capacity from the 1000SX's 1043cc up to 1099cc. However, the most expensive parts in an engine include the crankshaft and cylinder block, and both will have had to be altered to do this. The head itself now sits 3.3mm higher, meaning a change to the block deck height, this dimension being interesting in itself: as a result of the stroke change it would only have had to be raised by 1.5mm, so the extra 1.8mm may partly be a result of keeping the compression ratio the same. They say they have altered the ports, so some head changes also seem likely. All in, it seems a practical, workmanlike set of mods, and given the greater reduction in specific power I imagine they genuinely wanted to improve the torque spread too – although in absolute terms it has only gone up by 2Nm (about 1.5lb·ft), way less than the capacity change. Then again, the Suzuki's maximum torque figure has actually fallen…

BMW S1000RR: one cam for emissions, one for power

Now, let's compare what these two Japanese manufacturers have done against the approach taken by some other manufacturers. BMW have managed to increase power of the S1000RR to 207bhp even as they improved emissions. They could probably justify the likely extra expense because they need to be right at the sharp end for marketing reasons; when you make the 'mostest' litre bike and race it as well, therefore needing it to be a homologation platform too, you cannot afford to go backwards. They also have ShiftCam, which allows two different intake cam profiles, so they can optimise the low-load one for emissions while keeping the high-load one for power. Also, an S1000RR now starts at £17,990 – it'll be interesting to see where the new GSX-R's price lands relative to that…

Ducati, of course, have just developed their new V2 engine to supersede the Superquadro. Euro5+ may have had something to do with that replacement, and its electronically controlled VVT system (unlike the Suzuki) will absolutely be a benefit for it. But since it's a new engine and not an evolution, it is open to interpretation whether Euro5+ has cost them the thick end of 30bhp in the latest Panigale V2. Given the same company also makes a 213bhp V4 that meets Euro5+, clearly they don't lack the know-how when it comes to fixed valve timing engines (you will, however, need to pay the thick end of £25k for one…).

So, that's that. It's a case of you pays your money and you takes your choice as emissions ratchet down. A big part of this is how much budget you have, of course, and what your vehicle targets are. Some bikes long ago went past the 'too much is never enough' point and, in an objective sense, very few people will be unhappy with the power outputs of the revised Japanese bikes. Personally I am just glad that engineers the world over are still developing combustion engines, and even more so that the buying public does not want to let them go. I am also very grateful that modern systems allow them to be orders of magnitude cleaner than they used to be. However the limits are met – and they must be – there is life in the old dog yet.

New GSX-R1000R: more wings; less bhp and torque

BACK ONCE AGAIN

Suzuki's GSX-R1000R is returning to Europe, which is brilliant news – but it is 7bhp down on when we last met it. Reduced valve overlap is the culprit.

> 'There's an argument for saying the GSX-R represents a pragmatic way of meeting emissions regs'

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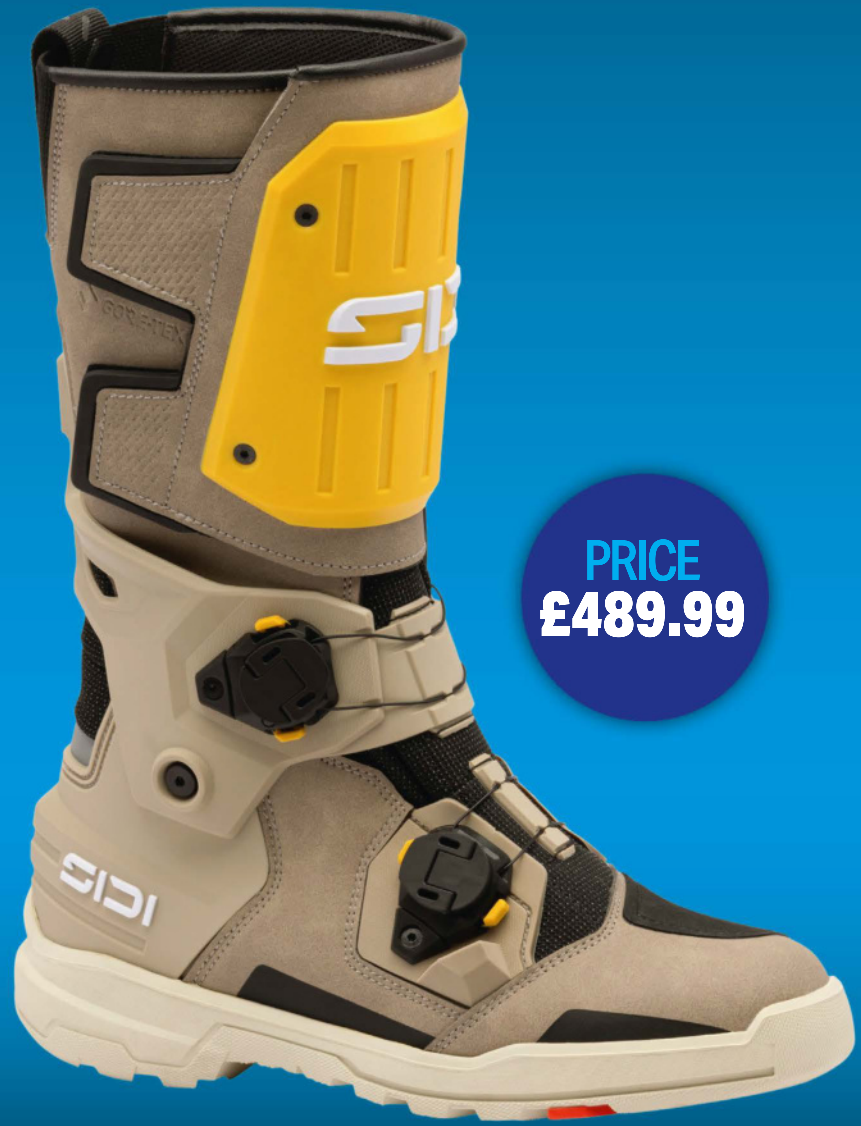
By **Lyle Armitage**



PRICE
£489.99

Sidi Taurus GTX

WHAT IS IT? A proper adventure boot, intended to be as comfortable and protective whether sitting and looking at the view, or standing like a Dakar rider. Three-point ankle support, two 'NUUN 001M' dials for adjustable fit, lots of armour, Gore-Tex to keep weather out, and a fancy Materiis sole.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Really like how these combine modern materials and protection with some old-school style – the screw-on yellow plate makes them look like something my dad would have worn before I was born. Way cooler than the usual black boot (although it comes in black, too). Also like all the stretch panels and adjustment – your 10.5 foot probably isn't exactly the same as mine.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £489.99 **sidiuk.com**

New stuff

Clobber for you and your motorcycle

» Shoei X-SPR PRO Gardner

WHAT IS IT? Shoei's race helmet has ECE 22.06 and FIM certification, a wide window for visibility, aerodynamic vents, adjustable cheek pads and other things you'd expect of a light, expensive helmet used by racers. Various colours and replicas (Márquez, Harrison) now joined by this Wayne Gardner scheme.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? The XSP-R Pro itself is the same ultra-protective, high-end lid that was launched a few years ago, but these new Gardner colours look phenomenal. Today's racers could learn a thing or two from this replica – namely that simple, classy designs are so much better than fussy ones.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£819.99 **shoeiassured.co.uk**

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« Weise Norvik jeans

WHAT IS IT? Single-layer denim riding jeans with AA certification, removable knee and hip armour, double and triple-stitched, and made without rivets. Traditional five-pocket design with zip fly and 'semi-boot cut'. Sizes S to 4XL.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? I'm never sure about riding jeans with obvious stretch panels and obvious armour. Surely the point is to look and feel like regular jeans. Like these. Semi-boot cut sounds like a good thing too – they'll slip over boots without looking like something Clarkson wears.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£159.99 **weiseclothing.com**

» Peak Design phone mount

WHAT IS IT? Machined aluminium mount for your phone. Ball joint to get the position just right, 'best in class' vibration isolation, and magnetic/mechanical 'SlimLink' fixing (needs a case or adaptor for your phone). This new version has a redesigned ball head, plus a version with optional wireless charging (£169.99).

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Some phone mounts are big and fussy, but this isn't one of them. Wireless charging is a good addition – no wires flapping everywhere – and I like that getting your phone back off just needs a press of a button. Looks modern, clean and simple.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
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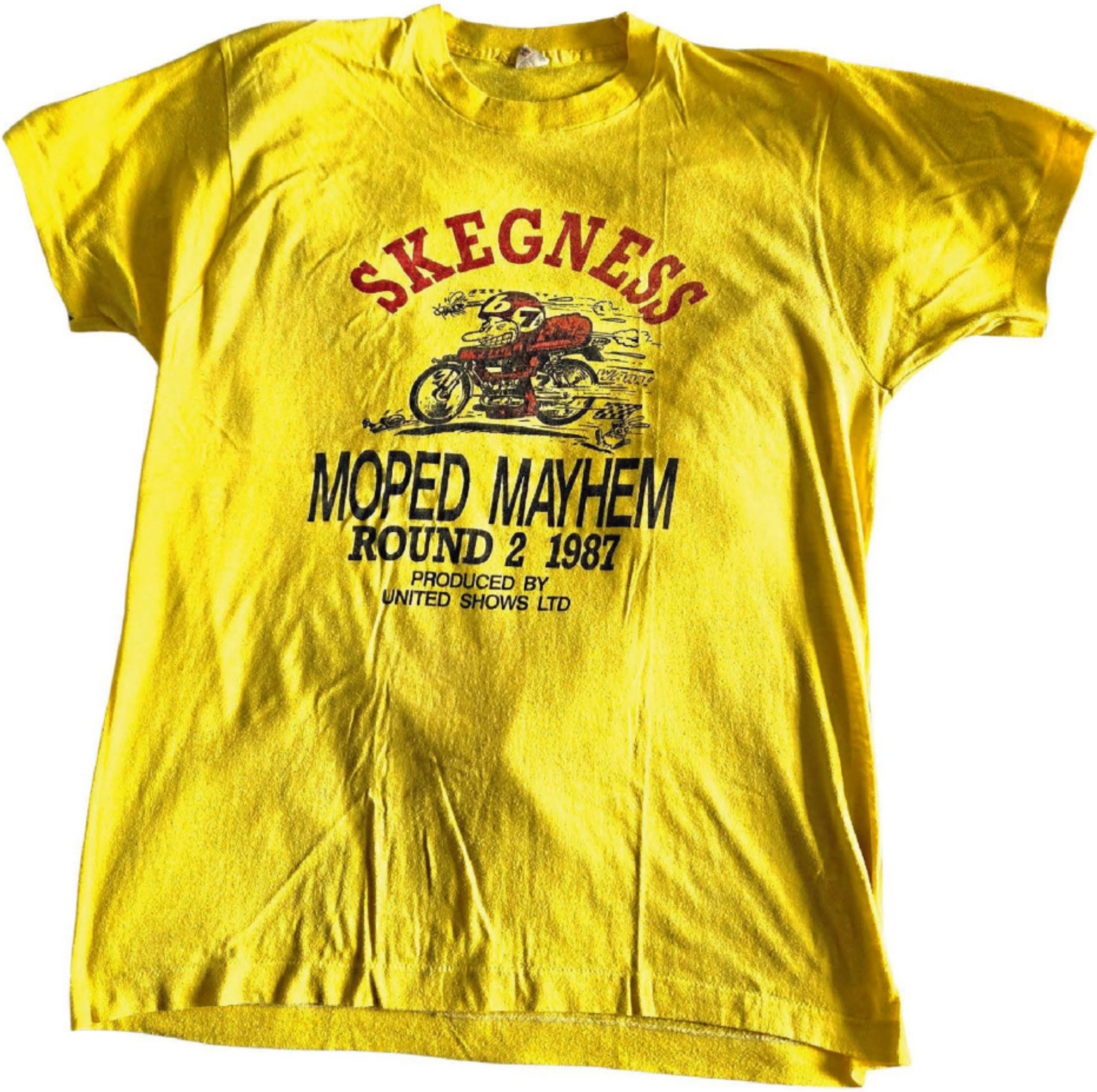


[**BEEN THERE, GOT THE T-SHIRT**]

'I got into the leading ten off the start. Then I was hit from behind...'

We were lucky. We, Team Moto Maladjusted on a Malaguti Olympique, didn't get an entry for the first round of Moped Mayhem in Birmingham, held in November, freezing cold, on a derelict building site. But we got into round two at a proper track, Skegness Raceway. I was first rider and got into the leading ten off the Le Mans start. Charging hard for the first corner, I was hit from behind. I went down, and the rest of the pack rode over me. All of 120 them, maybe more. Some came back for a second go. I ended up in Skegness Hospital. Moto Maladjusted came 34th, or 15th, or perhaps ninth. No one was really sure. **Mick Hayes**

IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD T-SHIRT LIKE MICK'S AND FANCY SEEING IT IN *BIKE*, TAKE A PICTURE OF THE *WHOLE* SHIRT, ARMS INCLUDED, AND EMAIL IT TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IF WE PUBLISH IT WE'LL SEND YOU A NEW T-SHIRT.

[STAR LETTER]

'Who needs an adventure bike?'

I recently booked a trip to Scotland out of the blue – probably because I'd never been to Scotland on a bike before. Shameful, I know.

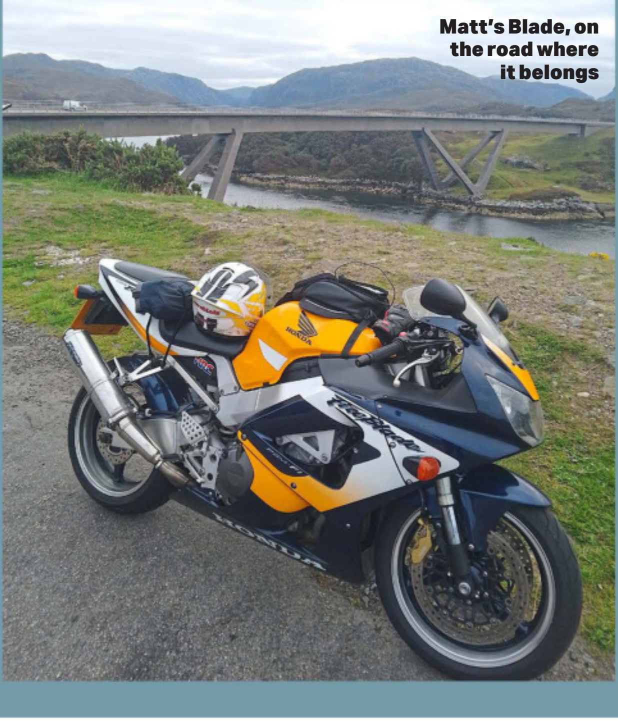
I loaded up with two weeks' worth of keep-me-alive camping gear, tent and map, and set off on my trusty 22-year-old Honda FireBlade 929. The perfect bike for this trip? Who knows if you never go. A back-up plan in the form of a recovery and get me home policy, and I'm off.

My North Coast 500 plan turned into a 1900-mile trip taking in Belfast, Cairnryan, Glasgow, Inverness, the NC500, Glasgow, Carlisle, the Lake District, Heysham, then the Isle of Man for the Manx GP and Classic TT.

Who says you need an adventure bike to have an adventure? My FireBlade overcame every challenge and got me home without any issues.

So get that ageing sportsbike out of the garage, dust it off and get out there. It's where these incredible machines belong.

Matt Brady


Matt's Blade, on the road where it belongs

Seeking thrills

Congratulations on another fine issue (*Bike*, November). Read as soon as it plopped through the letterbox, it's now mid-Friday afternoon and I've done my chores. I happen to glance at the mag on the table as I'm wondering what I'll do to fill the hour or so before it's acceptable to pour a pint.

Soon I'm on my favourite windy road, mercifully almost empty. An hour later and I'm home having proved, again, that the quickshifter works perfectly at max revs and I've made serious use of the limit point while ear 'oling (as we used to say) around several series of good curves.

Rode around the outside of a couple of GSs on a roundabout and showed a pillock in a 911 what proper acceleration looks like. Very irresponsible, but life-affirming and made this pensioner feel like a teenager again.

Thanks for the inspiration.

Ian Hadcocks

Patina with added 'Sheene'

Following your inclusion of the Suzuki GS1200SS (*Bike*, October), here's mine. I've had it since 2003, sold it once but bought it back shortly after. Originally it was black, but I got it painted as a Bazza tribute bike.

John's Suzuki GS1200SS. Bazza tribute colours are ace

It has a patina now, which makes it look like a '70s race bike. Sounds better with the end can.

It's always good to take to a bike meet. It draws a crowd – most people think it's a Gixer 1100.

I'm grateful to Alf England in Bedworth, which helped me keep it on the road, and was made up when I posted it on a Barry Sheene Facebook group and Steve Parrish gave it a like.

John Walker

Don't forget the Brownlees

Mat Oxley may know all there is to know about bike racing but his wider sports knowledge leaves a lot to be desired.

In November's issue, which has just plopped onto my doormat, he states in his article about the Márquez brothers that 'never before have siblings been at the top of any major sport, with the exception of tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams'.

Well, triathlon surely qualifies as a major sport and two brothers have dominated it recent times – and they just happen to be British. I am, of course, talking about Alistair and Jonny Brownlee, both of whom are Olympic and world champions.

The Spanish lads may be amazing on bikes, but they don't have to pedal them like our boys after a swim, then follow that up with a run.

John Farmer, Somerset

A way with words

What keeps us coming back? The creativity to put 'insouciance' and 'awks' into the same sentence…

Chapeau, Mr Hargreaves.

Clive Titterton

Ron schooled 'em

The *From the archive* article on Honda's VFR1200 (*Bike*, November) brought back memories from that particular day as my girlfriend and I were both there attending Ron Haslam's race school.

Rocket Ron schooling MFG on the VFR1200. This is about as close as Ron let him get...

We remember seeing Bradley Smith being introduced to riding a 600 in preparation for his Moto2 debut, and the amazing Ron riding the VFR and – as Martin said – putting some distance between them. All was a bonus on top of a fantastic time at Ron's race school.

Thank you, Martin, for lighting that memory for us both.

Pete Marchant

Enlighten us

Perusing the November issue – in particular the sporty nakeds group test – it struck me that the Eveready bicycle lamp I used to have on the front of my schooldays transport looks to be bigger than the headlamp on the Yamaha MT-09.

I know LED technology means many lumens can be thrown forward from the source, but bright and blinding doesn't help much along country roads after dark if the light isn't focused.

The more 'traditional' round headlamps also seem suspect during late-night foolery when they seem to have a plethora of lighting combinations that owe more to the kiddies-and-crayons design school than a serious attempt at lighting the highways and byways and avoiding nocturnal mammals.

When we were all younger, *Bike* looked into improving the UJM glow-worm headlamps. As a result my RD400E gained a Cibie headlamp conversion. Still got it, too – bike and headlamp. So, are today's headlights any use?

Timothy Brinkman

An active and engaged riding position – or just 'hunched up in some weird pose' asks Ed

There are exceptions, but most modern headlights are good. From powerful LEDs and cornering lights to the Tracer 9's Matrix setup, firms have so many more tools in their arsenal than just glowing filaments. How well they apply this tech is the difference between brilliant bike design and superficial styling. MFG

New stance on rider stances?

Yesterday I saw another GS pilot going up our local high street standing up like he was riding an off-road section of trail. Also, a good proportion of riders I see on naked bikes are all hunched up in some weird pose, even in a straight line at legal speeds.

Is this some new way of riding that has passed me by? Or just another pointless habit like leg-dangling into corners (and, yes, I've seen that on the road too)?

Ed Marrian

Big miles, big thoughts

Nick Sanders always produces excellent and thought-provoking narratives on his journeys, and philosophy on adventure riding. His recent pieces in *Bike* (Oct and Nov) having ridden around the edge of Europe are no exception.

His references to his family were especially poignant. When he has to stop – and I hope that point is a long way off – he'll find it very hard, but his incredible cache of memories will surely help.

David Thomas

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Sports-touring showdown

Kawasaki's Ninja 1100SX SE and **Yamaha's Tracer 9 GT+** take on a two-day, 450-mile road trip to crown Japan's best all-rounder

By **Martin Fitz-Gibbons** Photography **Stuart Collins**

High up on the North York Moors, a single sinuous sliver of asphalt slices through an otherwise spectacularly undisturbed natural landscape. Sprawling out in every direction, the emptiness is so vast and so deep you could drown in it. No buildings or bus stops. No pylons or phone masts. No road signs or roundabouts. Whichever way you look, the only thing from here to the horizon is a 360° blur of constantly evolving colour. A vivid patchwork of golden straws, smoky browns and bucolic greens, flecked with the blazing purple of flowering heather, and the occasional off-white blob of a befuddled sheep. The scene's stark simplicity and soft focus means it doesn't feel entirely real, like riding through an unfinished oil painting, a hazy recollection or a delirious fever dream. It's absolute bliss.

This is perfect sports-touring territory. But these days it's not quite so clear what makes a perfect sports-tourer. Rewind a few decades and there was only one way to do it: a full fairing, a superbike-based engine, and a focused stance only slightly backed off with higher clip-ons and lower rearsets. The closest equivalent in showrooms today is Kawasaki's Ninja 1100SX – recently given a larger engine, plus a premium SE version with some brand-name bits. When we pitched it against its closest competitors earlier this year (*Bike*, April 2025), the Ninja eclipsed the lot both convincingly and unanimously.

There's more than one way to skin the sports-touring cat, though. For the past 10 years Yamaha's Tracer has broken all the traditional rules, fusing together an upright riding position, long-travel suspension, a roadster engine and bare-bones bodywork. Yet it's evolved into such a stunningly capable and complete all-rounder that last year we declared the previous Tracer 9 GT+ to be 'the best sports-tourer ever to come from Japan.' Now it's now gone even further, this updated 2025 model bristling with more tech, more features – and notably fewer clutch and gear levers…

Ninja and Tracer enjoying their natural habitat. But which is best?

> 'These days it's not quite so clear what makes a perfect sports-tourer'

Moor-ish (adj): an insatiable appetite for empty roads and vast skies

The best SX yet, thanks to 14 years of refinement

So, which 'best Japanese sports-tourer' is actually best?

Do spare the horses

It's not clear when Nigel Tufnel started working in Kawasaki's R&D department, but the Ninja SX now goes to 11. Since it was launched as the Z1000SX in 2011, the beloved bestseller has been built around the same 1043cc inline four. But now, perhaps needing 'that extra push over the cliff', it's been stroked out to a more fulsome 1099cc. Mechanical changes go further than just the longer-throw crank responsible for the additional capacity – there are new pistons, cams, rods and cylinders, and a new head. The result is more torque, improved fuel economy and cleaner emissions too. And less power.

Sorry… less power? As in, a reduced amount? A smaller number? Nigel definitely wouldn't approve. The damage is a heady six horsepower: the old 1000 peaked at 140bhp; this new 1100 makes 'just' 134bhp. So that must mean it's slower, and therefore worse, and therefore an abject disaster and an embarrassing failure.

Except it's not. Bustling briskly across midsummer moorland, the new Ninja feels better than ever. Not faster, granted, but in no way lacking. The new 1100 pulls with relentless, consistent enthusiasm, picking up purposefully from as little as 3000rpm, building through a butch, bulging midrange, and firing on forcefully to its five-figure redline. The rev limiter has had a slight haircut, now chipping in at 10,500rpm instead of the 1000's 11,000rpm, possibly to cap piston speeds in light of the longer stroke. But at the kind of less-frantic revs the engine naturally encourages you to use – and, in fairness, the kind of revs that can be unleashed while avoiding clattering into a stray sheep – it feels utterly sublime.

Now, before we get carried away, the 1100's 'extra torque' doesn't actually count for a lot either. Sure, a dyno run confirms the 1100 boasts a few more lb·ft from tickover to 7500rpm. But that's not the full story, because Kawasaki also overhauled the SX's gearing: from primary (taller); to secondary (shorter); to the individual ratios in fifth and sixth (both taller). Crunching the numbers on *Bike*'s office Stepped Reckoner reveals there isn't actually any more thrust reaching the 1100's rear wheel.

What you instead get from the 1100 is a new-found level of refinement, a higher level of sophistication and syrupy smoothness. There's less frenetic buzzing through the grips, thanks to heavier weights both inside the handlebars and on the bar ends. It feels as if the motor isn't having to try as hard to deliver the same rush of speed. The Ninja's two-way quickshifter is crisper too, feeling more positive through the pedal and less crunchy on downshifts than the 1000.

Overall, the powertrain feels classier than before – not wilder or more exciting, but more polished. It's the same story with this SE model's chassis parts, which have been upgraded with Brembo front brake calipers and an Öhlins shock. You may look at them and imagine brick-wall stopping power and track-attack stiffness, but that's not the reality. Along with the new braided lines, the four-pot brakes bite firmly and confidently but politely, with good feel through the lever and no unwelcome grabbiness.

The S46 shock isn't some MotoGP wannabe either. It comes from the simpler end of the Swedish firm's range, with a single damping adjuster and a useful remote preload hand wheel, and delivers a plush, forgiving ride that's definitely a step up on the basic model, but without ever feeling excessively stiff.

It's certainly at home up here on the spectacular Blakey Ridge road, scurrying along for mile after mile of uninterrupted riding. The absence of traffic, junctions and villages to break things up means concentration levels have to be kept high, but the Ninja relishes being able to keep its momentum undisturbed. It flows along with grace and composure, the steering easy and accurate yet solid and settled. Bridgestone S23 tyres give great confidence, there's never an issue with ground clearance, and the beautifully balanced riding position lets you get your head down, your elbows up and engage with the chassis. It's familiar, it's comfortable, and it's exactly how we know a sports-tourer should feel.

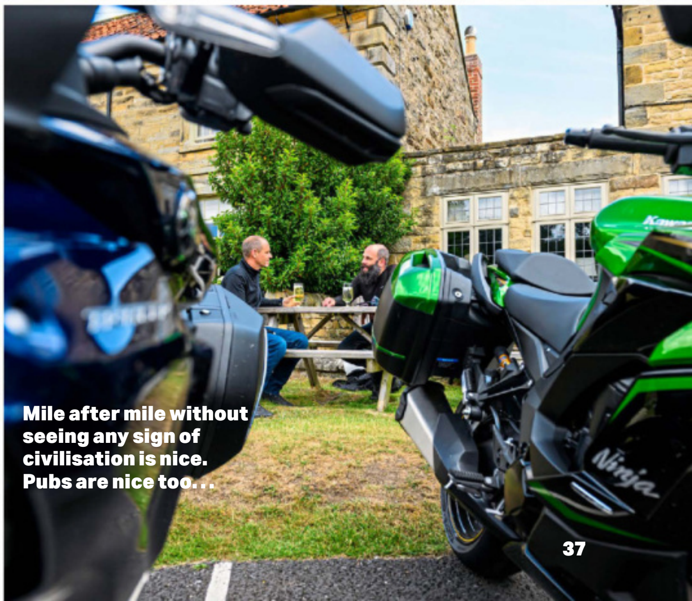
All fingers and umms

Yamaha's Tracer 9 GT+, on the other hand, is taking some getting used to. That's nothing to do with its rorty 890cc triple, its spacious high-rise riding position, or its semi-active KYB suspension – all of which we know and love from the Tracer 9 GT (non-Plus) which came out on top in our August issue's group test.

What has veteran tester Michael Neeves and I scratching our lids is a general sense that the GT+ has become a bit too clever for its own good – as if it doesn't always do what you ask, then comes up with

‘What you get from the 1100 is a higher level of sophistication and syrupy smoothness’

Views more suited to Yam’s ‘D’ mode, roads to Sport mode



Mile after mile without seeing any sign of civilisation is nice. Pubs are nice too…

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some ideas of its own. It starts with the GT+'s now-standard Y-AMT. Yamaha's advanced transmission uses electronic actuators (rather than human effort) to control its clutch and gearbox. In plain English, there's no clutch lever or gear pedal. You can either run it as a semi-auto, changing gears with a rocker switch on the left bar (push thumb for down; pull index finger for up), or let the bike decide, turning into a fully automatic twist-and-go.

But it's not just this fancy gearbox in isolation. Y-AMT has been sewn so deeply into the Tracer's seven riding modes, four suspension settings (two of them tuned via a phone app, for some reason) and at least seven indecipherable initialism-based rider aids (SCS, LIF, BSR, EBM etc… WTF?) that getting our heads round the whole thing, how it all works and how we should be riding it, is taking some time.

We start in fully automatic 'D' mode. The famously fruity CP3 motor feels limp, gears are hurried through and the suspension is wobbly and underdamped when leant over. No, thank you. Next is 'D+' mode, which gives the motor a touch more sparkle and holds gears for longer, but still occasionally needs nudging up or down via the flappy paddles. Better, but still not right.

Pressing 'AT/MT' unlocks five more manual modes – Sport, Street, Rain and two Customs. Deep breath. Street feels much like D+. Rain proves even weedier than D. Sport mode, however, delivers the fieriest throttle map, the least electronic 'assistance' and the firmest suspension. Now we're getting somewhere.

Sport comes closest to the full-fat, dynamic, exciting, engaging, surging Tracer 9 experience we'd been expecting. The motor itself is an all-time great, with responsive and ever-ready grunt across the whole rev range, plus a gurgling, textured, buzzsaw exhaust note. The Tracer's triple has a more condensed, consistent delivery than the SX, with similar midrange, shorter gearing and less of a top-end rush. But despite being one piston and 200cc shy of the Ninja, on these moorland roads it romps along in much the same way, at much the same speed. Once you get into it, changing gears with fingers rather than toes turns out to not be better or worse, just different – though getting over that initial alien hump requires some conscious reprogramming, overriding the habits forged during a riding lifetime. The shifts themselves are phenomenally slick: super-smooth and all completed in 0.1s. That's literally the blink of an eye.

When the roller-coaster road tightens up, the Tracer's chassis is agile and quick-steering. Being sat more upright and higher up than the Ninja, grasping wider bars, there's loads of leverage to throw the Tracer around, and a commanding panoramic view of the road ahead. But when the route straightens out and the pace picks up, the Tracer isn't quite as planted as the Ninja – it seems looser, less connected to the road surface. Push things hard and the Yamaha's pegs touch down too; you'd have to ride the Ninja a fair bit harder before it starts sparking.

As we press on towards the north end of the North York Moors, the Tracer's brakes occasionally do something odd on the way into corners, seemingly changing pressure without me squeezing the lever any harder. At first I think I'm imagining it, but after it happens a couple more times I rummage around in the 200-page owner's manual for clues. There, on page 63, it describes something called Brake Control. An assist that combines both lean-sensitive ABS and linked braking, apparently 'a variety of conditions may cause BC to brake faster than expected for a desired cornering speed'. I switch it off, and my phantom brake issue vanishes. Too clever for its own good…

> **'Y-AMT is sewn so deeply into the Tracer that getting our heads round the whole thing takes time'**

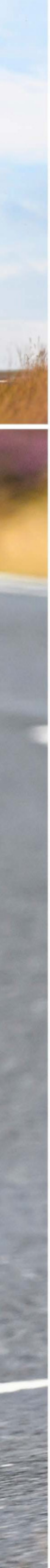
Kawasaki
Ninja

Centrestand, eh? That's just showing off

Now turn around and ride it the other way – it's too good not to

Two different ways of going about it, both impressive

‘Yamaha have gone all out, swinging for the digital fences with the GT+... It's a lot to take in’



A penchant for the practical

As much fun as it is – and it's a lot of fun – zapping around the deliciously desolate North York Moors, these hedonistic high jinks only cover the first half of a sports-tourer's remit. When life slows down, these bikes need to have a useful, practical side as well.

Back on the Kawasaki, there's an awful lot to like. The 1100SX's riding position is more compact and tipped towards the front end than the Tracer, but still not at all extreme. With its clip-ons raised above the top yoke, it's somewhere between a classic VFR and a sporty naked. Cruise control and two-way quickshifter are both standard, the TFT dash is small but clear, and the 19-litre fuel tank lasts 150 miles before the reserve light starts blinking. Negatives are few, but the gruesome USB-C charging brick tacked onto the left bar looks like a last-minute afterthought, while heated grips (standard on SE models) don't show their heat level on the dash. Instead you have to take your eyes off the road to study a coded sequence of flashing coloured lights on a button on the grip itself.

Wind protection's decent though. The screen pivots manually through four angles, and this Tourer comes with a taller, wider windshield that stays turbulence free. Tourers also get a pair of colour-matched 28-litre panniers, though still no approval from Kawasaki to fit a top box at the same time. Nor a centrestand…

The Tracer, however, raises everything to the next level. Instead of regular ol' cruise control, it has adaptive radar-informed cruise. Instead of a manually tiltable windscreen, it's electronically adjustable through an impressive 10cm. Its TFT dash is 7in instead of 4.3in; heated grips have 10 settings instead of three; the USB-C port is neatly integrated; and panniers hold 30 litres instead of 28.

Then there's stuff the Tracer comes with that the Kawasaki just can't match. Like its centrestand, its tyre pressure monitors and its hill-hold control. The Tracer 9 GT+ comes with a DLC-coated chain, which should need less maintenance. Suspension can be tweaked at the push of a button, instead of needing to find a screwdriver. Keyless ignition might be the scourge of group tests, but it's genuinely useful when you're an owner who's not hopping between bikes. The Tracer's lighter than the Ninja, it uses less fuel, and U-turns in less space – once you get over early nerves about slow-speed moves without a clutch lever, of course.

When all the fun is said and done, it's the Tracer I'm eyeing up to make the four-hour ride home pass as quickly and as easily as possible. After crossing the Humber Bridge and hitting a run of straight-line multi-lane miles I pop the Yamaha into full auto, wind the screen up, set the adaptive cruise, then sit back and watch on from a cocoon of chillaxed calm as late afternoon blurs effortlessly into early evening.

Verdict

The quick-and-dirty version is that the Kawasaki is more simple sports, the Yamaha more high-tech touring. The Ninja is intuitive and familiar, largely because it's so much more modest in its ambition. It has a healthy smattering of gadgets and features, but nothing that's especially cutting edge, groundbreaking or innovative – or, indeed, that an experienced rider might find bewildering. On the other hand, Yamaha have gone all out with the Tracer 9 GT+, swinging for the digital fences and loading it up with almost every piece of tech available in the motorcycling world. It's a lot to take in – even for a couple of old hands with 50-odd years of professional testing between them.

It's impossible to separate the Tracer 9 GT+ from its Y-AMT system, which is a mixed bag. The shift action is incredibly refined, and there are times where full auto is welcome (often when you're not in the mood). But the digital brain that decides when to shift isn't a mind reader, so it's never going to do exactly what you want, exactly when you want. All in all, it isn't a clear improvement over a manual clutch and a quality quickshifter – certainly not for enough riding, or enough riders. But given you can't have a Tracer 9 GT+ with a manual gearbox now, that has to leave the regular GT as our pick of the current Tracer 9 line-up – and at £14,354, it's a darn sight cheaper, too.

Kawasaki's Ninja, on the other hand, is enthrallingly easy to get on with. Yes, the Tracer highlights room for improvement – such as its tiny dash and lack of a centrestand – but as an overall package it's compelling. The 1100SX SE delivers a significant step up in smoothness and sophistication over the 1000, with a superior ride from its Öhlins shock, and fewer vibes felt through the bars. It rides beautifully: poised, planted and permanently potent. Considered as a total package – including value – the Ninja 1100SX SE is definitely Japan's best sports-tourer.

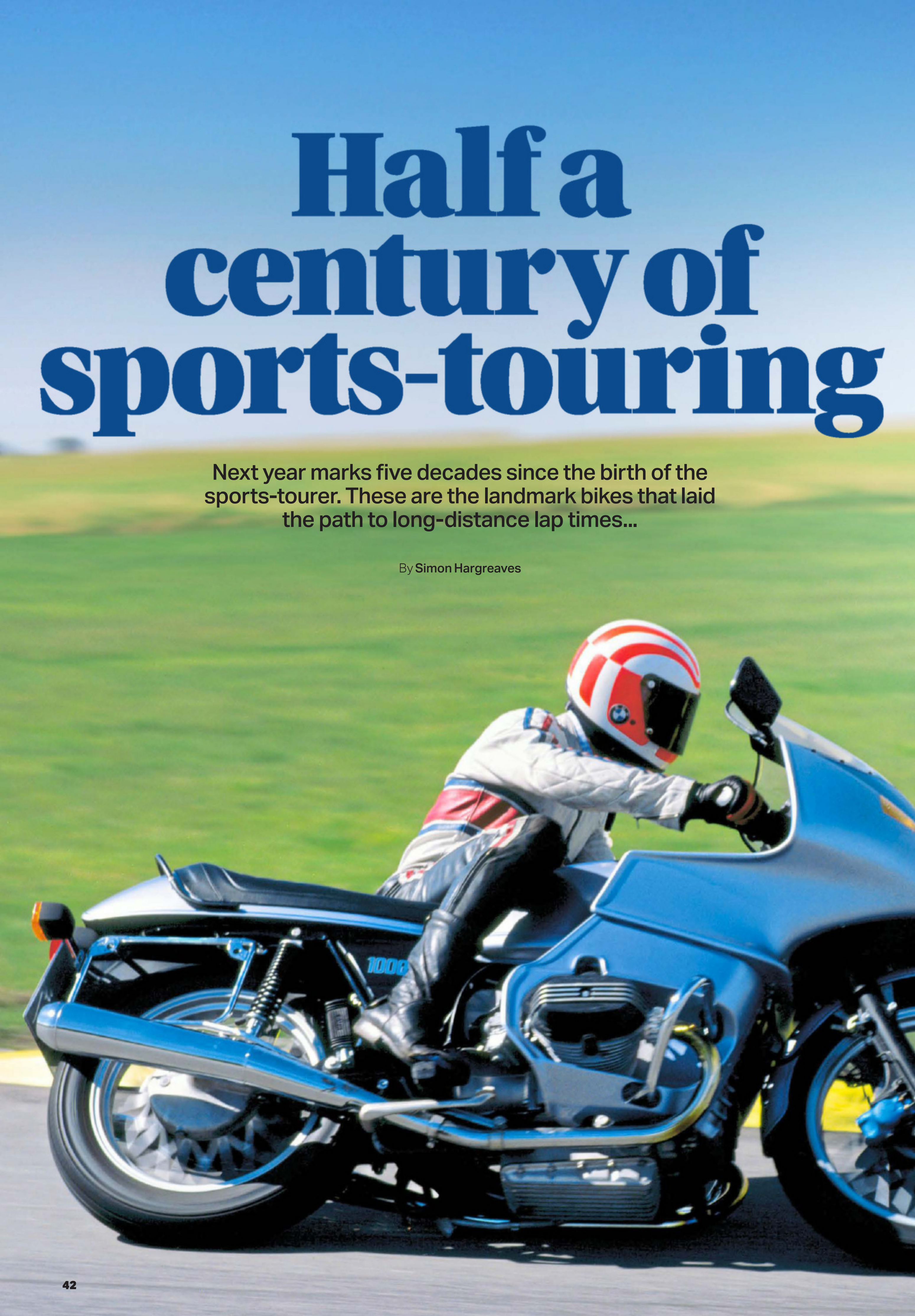
Tech nerds will love the Tracer (left). But can we get a manual box, please?

SPECIFICATIONS	KAWASAKI NINJA 1100SX SE TOURER	YAMAHA TRACER 9 GT+
Contact	www.kawasaki.co.uk	www.yamaha-motor.eu/gb
Price (on the road)	£15,175	£17,004
Capacity	1099cc	890cc
Engine	16v DOHC inline four	12v DOHC inline triple
Bore x stroke	77 x 59mm	78 x 62.1mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain
Power (claimed)	134bhp @ 9000rpm	117bhp @ 10,000rpm
Torque (claimed)	83lb·ft @ 7600rpm	69lb·ft @ 7000rpm
Frame	aluminium twin-spar	aluminium twin-spar
Front suspension	41mm usd telescopic forks, fully adjustable	43mm usd telescopic forks, adjustable preload and semi-active damping
Rear suspension	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound	monoshock, adjustable preload and semi-active damping
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 300mm discs, four-piston calipers / 260mm disc, single-piston caliper	2 x 298mm discs, four-piston calipers / 267mm disc, single-piston caliper
Tyres (f/r)	120/70 ZR17 / 190/50 ZR17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17
Rake/trail	24° / 98mm	24.4° / 106mm
Wheelbase	1440mm	1500mm
Weight	234kg (claimed)	232kg (claimed)
Seat height	835mm	845/860mm
Tank size	19 litres	19 litres
Economy	47.2mpg, 197-mile range	48.8mpg, 204-mile range
Electronics	cornering ABS and traction control, cruise control, riding modes, two-way quickshifter	cornering ABS and traction control, radar cruise control, riding modes, auto gearbox
***Bike* rating**	9/10	8/10

Half a century of sports-touring

Next year marks five decades since the birth of the sports-tourer. These are the landmark bikes that laid the path to long-distance lap times…

By **Simon Hargreaves**



Left: BMW's R100RS, the Genesis of the genre

1976 BMW R100RS
Performance meets protection

» 980cc flat twin » 70bhp @ 7000rpm
» 56lb·ft @ 6000rpm » 230kg » 24-litre tank

BMW's 1976 R100RS claims two world firsts: first sports-tourer, and first fully faired production bike. We'll give it the former, but the mid-1950s Vincent Black Prince and Ariel Leader both had large windscreens and integrated leg protectors that looked a lot like a full fairing.

However, the RS was the first production bike to benefit from wind tunnel development, 'specifically tailored to the physical properties of the motorcycle itself', said BMW. Unlike the Vincent's and Ariel's plastics, the RS's fairing wasn't a barn door to beat wind into submission but shaped to cut through it and enhance high-speed stability.

It was an evolution of 1973's handlebar-mounted, bikini-faired R90S – the first BMW styled by an actual designer, Hans Muth, not by post-engineering consequence. Muth then set about sculpting a fairing for the RS, which stands for Reise Sport ('Travel Sports').

If the idea of combining sportsbike requirements (high-performance engine, agile chassis, compact riding position) with a tourer's (ride quality, luggage and pillion capacity, relaxed ergonomics) seem contrary now, imagine the confusion in 1976. With no category to put the RS into context, BMW simply called it 'the best superbike in the world' in adverts – and with the 980cc boxer making 70bhp, it sort of was back then. Didn't win any races, which the R90S notably did at the TT and Daytona, but the R100RS was well up for comfortable high-speed distance.

I should know. In December 2006 I rode an RS the 847 miles from John o' Groats to Land's End in 12 and a half hours through the worst storms in half a century (70.6mph average). Completely enclosed by a fairing that, by today's standards, absolutely was a barn door – it even enveloped my hands – the RS proved, 30 years on, it was still able to handle big miles at speed.

VFR750F-G: very sporty in the right hands

1986 Honda VFR750F-G
Race-ready and reliable

» 748cc 90° V4 » 105bhp @ 10,500rpm
» 56lb·ft @ 9000rpm » 221kg » 20-litre tank

Following years of notorious mechanical and build quality issues with their original VF750 range in the early '80s, Honda spared no expense constructing the next-generation VFR in 1986. Designed to restore the company's reputation, the over-engineered VFR was rumoured to be a loss-leader and cost more to build than could be recouped through sales (nevertheless, a new 1986 VFR750 was a few hundred quid cheaper than its Yamaha FZ750 and Suzuki GSX-R750 rivals).

Central to the V4 motor were its gear-driven cams; expensive to produce and assemble, but guaranteeing consistent cam performance (dodgy cams were the heart of the previous V4's reliability problems, but it wasn't the timing so much as the production method).

Claimed power was boosted from the old VF750's uncompetitive 84bhp to 105bhp, and an aluminium frame (still a novelty in 1986) added to the spec. But surprisingly, it wasn't a full-on sportsbike; outgunned by more dedicated race-rep 750s, the softer, comfier, less-track-focused VFR was more of an all-rounder.

None of which stopped a desperate Ron Haslam, then a Honda Grand Prix rider, who rolled one out of a showroom when his race bike blew up, took the indicators off, and raced it the 1986 Transatlantic meeting at Donington Park. Up against race-prepped superbikes ridden by the likes of Kevin Schwantz, Rob McElnea and Keith Huewen, it rained – and Rocket Ron put the bog-stock VFR on the podium in two races, sealing the VFR's reputation as reliable and fast.

Two years later Honda created the RC30 – different engine and chassis – to rule the racetrack, but the road-going VFR750 went on to rule the sports-touring world. And it could still race at the end of its reign – 11 years later, in 1997, in its final year of production, I took a stock VFR750 to eighth place in an eight-hour endurance race at Snetterton. Not exactly Ron's feat, but not bad for an old sporty tourer.

PHOTOGRAPHY BMW, CHIPPYWOOD, BAUER ARCHIVE

Still seen touring Europe today. The VFR800 is nigh on bulletproof

1998 Honda VFR800
Spawn of a superbike

» 782cc 90° V4 » 108bhp @ 10,500rpm
» 61lb·ft @ 8500rpm » 224kg » 21-litre tank

By 1997 Honda's VFR750 was still the world's default sports-tourer, but the class was stretching the interpretation of the category: Kawasaki's ZZR1100 and Honda's own Blackbird were much, much faster than the VFR, frequently seen hammering Europe's motorways loaded with panniers and top box.

Meanwhile, the 600cc sportsbike class had produced passable sports-tourers in Kawasaki's ZZR600 and Yamaha's Thundercat – not to mention Honda's own CBR600, still winning races on track and getting loaded with luggage on the road.

BMW's offering, the R1100RS (p106) with its 90bhp flat twin and weird Telelever front end, might have been a groundbreaker but it was still a niche choice, while most of Triumph's options were still based around the original 885cc Hinckley triple.

Honda had eked about as much as they could from the VFR750, having switched to a single-sided swingarm and given it Ferrari Testarossa-style fairing slats to sex it up.

The 1998 VFR800 upgrade lengthened stroke to pep up midrange engine performance, switched central cam gear drive to the side of the engine (copying the RC45 race bike's design, from which the VFR's motor drew inspiration), moved to fuel injection to help meet a new emissions target called Euro1 (never catch on), and used a new frame design that pivoted the (still single-sided) swingarm directly from the back of the VFR's crankcases, with twin side-mounted radiators because there was no room to put them behind the front wheel.

The result was a significant dynamic improvement over the 750 – more performance, refined handling, a bit more weight and slightly portly styling edged the VFR800 – and sports-touring – towards middle age.

2005 Triumph Sprint ST 1050
Bigger, better and British

» 1050cc inline triple » 123bhp @ 9250rpm
» 77lb·ft @ 5000rpm » 225kg » 21-litre tank

Triumph's 2005 Sprint ST 1050 – 'Sports Tourer', a tongue-in-cheek nod to BMW's RS initialism – was neither their first Sprint nor their first sports-tourer.

The half-faired 1993 Sprint 900 was one of Hinckley's original models, revamped into 1999's fully faired, frumpily styled 955cc Sprint ST. That ST was a solid performer, but lacked either sportsbike zing or touring practicality; at least one of them being a fundamental requirement of a sports-tourer.

Enter the Sprint ST 1050 in 2005; a brand new, compact inline triple motor making a proper 123bhp housed in an aluminium beam frame with a still (just) de rigueur single-sided swingarm. Three underseat exhaust cans at the rear of the bike echoed the fairing's

Sprint ST 1050: knocked the VFR off its perch triple headlight arrangement and three circular dash dials at the front, and served to cement Triumph's commitment to three cylinders as their signature engine configuration, following years flirting with the odd inline four. And although the base ST came without panniers, hard cases and top box were a factory option from the start – and by 2007 they were fitted as standard; a sports-touring first.

The Sprint ST 1050 was a definitive sports-touring statement of intent and revitalised a stagnating category. Churning, midrange-rich power delivery, modern styling, a sporty handling dynamic and all-day ergonomics – and a Union Jack badge, if it mattered. More powerful, gruntier, lighter and £700 cheaper than a VFR800, there was no reason to buy anything else if you wanted power, agility and panniers.

For almost 20 years Honda's VFR had set the sports-touring reference. But no longer. In 2005 the Sprint ST outsold the VFR800 (by then in its fourth year with VTEC variable valve timing) by two-to-one.

Z1000SX: fast, comfy, well-priced. Fought back against the adventure bikes

> 'The Sprint ST 1050 was a definitive sports-touring statement of intent'

2011 Kawasaki Z1000SX
Back to basics

» 1043cc inline four » 136bhp @ 9600rpm » 81lb·ft @ 7800rpm » 228kg » 19-litre tank

By the end of the millennium's first decade, the sports-tourer class had gone from stagnant to moribund. Adventure bikes were in the ascendency, distorting the market and stealing sales of everything from tourers to sportsbikes.

And sports-tourers themselves felt redundant. Triumph's Sprint GT replaced the Sprint ST in 2010 but wasn't an upgrade; by now it looked dated and Triumph had lengthened its wheelbase with a longer swingarm, which wrecked handling – the GT steered so badly the front tyre wore out before the rear.

Honda's VFR800 was in stasis, largely unchanged since 2002's VTEC revamp, and the 2010 VFR1200 failed to stimulate demand despite an outstanding V4 motor thanks to incoherent styling and high price tag.

BMW didn't have an RS in their line-up. The R1150RS was discontinued in 2005 to be replaced by the R1200ST – a bike so ugly even BMW couldn't bear to make it. It was discontinued in 2007.

Into this vacuum stepped Kawasaki's 2011 Z1000SX – a fully faired Z1000 with a comfy, lightly sportified riding position (clip-ons comprehensively above the top yoke), adjustable screen, digital dash, smooth motor, the option for panniers, and a price tag that undercut bikes like the VFR1200 by nearly two grand.

Turns out it was the sports-tourer people wanted all along. It was a hit – one in three Kawasakis sold over the next few years was a Z1000SX. But it didn't stand still – every few years it got a bit better: panniers were integrated instead of on racks, suspension got better with every iteration, fairing and screen were tweaked, electronics appeared. And with this year's Ninja 1100SX evolution – with a larger, less powerful but much more useful engine – it feels as if the SX success story is set to continue for a few more years to come.

So, does BMW's R1300RS move the game on?

Nearly 50 years after its forefather created the class, does BMW's latest sports-touring boxer deserve a place among the greats?

2025 BMW R1300RS

» 1300cc flat twin » 143bhp @ 7750rpm » 110lb·ft @ 6500rpm » 245kg » 17-litre tank

The dichotomy facing BMW's R1300RS development team was the same facing the R100RS team 50 years ago: make the RS more sporty or more tourer-y?

Thankfully, we don't have to interpret BMW's 2025 decision because they state it themselves, saying the R1300RS 'offers an even sportier riding experience than its predecessor'. Pretty unequivocal, except they then say 'it remains the perfect companion for comfortable touring and long-distance travel' – for which there's not much evidence.

Riding position is more compact than the R1250RS with lower clip-ons and more rearset footpegs, but the 1300 doesn't get a bigger tank (it's actually smaller), or a more effective fairing, or a taller screen. But it does get more tech, a bigger engine, uprated suspension and neater transmission.

So, let's unpack what the R1300RS does better than the 1250, what it does the same, what's worse, and in which direction it's moved the sports-touring game.

Like the rest of the R series, the RS has a new engine and chassis: pistons, rods, crank, valvetrain, gearbox (relocated under the engine), clutch, crankcases, cylinder heads; new steel beam frame and aluminium subframe, uprated suspension (with world's first two-stage variable fork spring rate), revised steering geometry, lighter wheels, new styling, sportier riding position, wider rear tyre and a slew of new electronics including radar-assisted cruise control and collision avoidance system. Basically, the entire bike.

It's still a flat twin, but capacity is upped with wider bores and shorter stroke (said every new sportsbike engine, ever), making the motor more oversquare and increasing its capacity to rev. And top end is where the 1300 squeezes more juice than the 1250 – above 6000rpm (when peak power is at 7750rpm, that's the top end!). Compared to the 1250, the 1300 motor is fresher, livelier, smoother, quicker to rev – and the extra top end is noticeable without trade-off in midrange or bottom end. It's lost the old motor's lumpy, long-throw throbby-ness – a characteristic in gentle decline with every new flat twin since the R100RS.

But for outright performance, the 1300 flies like no 1976 flat twin could imagine. It doesn't gather speed so much as have it bundled up on tap; just twist the grip for instant access to very fast indeed. And it cruises better too – 70mph in top is a lazy 3600rpm.

The new transmission is a huge leap. Rather, there's no huge leap across neutral from first to second. Quickshifted gears slide home precisely – and BMW's ASA semi-auto system is the best of the lot. It'll go full auto, or you can use the foot lever. The motor can't stall – at low speed it's like a big twist 'n' go scooter.

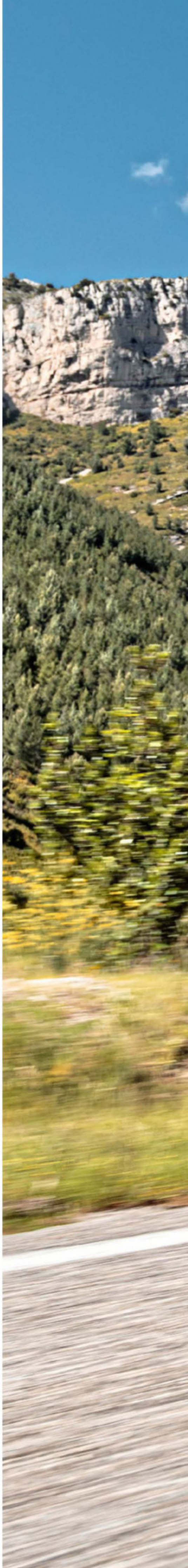
Roadholding, ride quality, cornering control and braking are all as classy as the 1250 – the 1300 still glides over bumps with disdain. Not so sure about its steering, though. The old RS was never the most nimble; the new RS is also ponderous at the front and needs appreciable bar pressure to turn. The 1300 has more trail, and a 190 rear tyre instead of a 180, so maybe that explains its reluctance to turn.

'The R1300RS flies like no 1976 flat twin could imagine'

Or maybe it just needs wider, upright handlebars instead of clip-ons, like the R. That'd improve the riding position, which is even more canted forward than the 1250 – it places weight on wrists and crunches knee angle, but the low seat still means you put a lot of weight through your derrière.

It even looks odd: while out riding the new RS, a passer-by asked if it was the low seat version. And when I saw someone else riding it, from the front it looked like a maxi-scoot, which isn't a good look.

Et voilà, we're back to the dichotomy. It's subjective, but much as I love the R1250RS, a more relaxed riding position, bigger screen and larger tank would suit the R1300RS better – which, BMW would argue, describes the R1300RT; now so compact it's more like a sports-tourer, too. And it goes to show that moving the game on very much depends in which direction your customers want the game to go. Bike



Prefer Sport to Reise? The R1300RS has shifted its focus

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More sense than money

Agility, thrashability and versatility – and all without needing to sell a kidney. Step forward three of the most complete new bikes you can get for £10k

By **Justin Hayzelden** Photography **Jason Critchell**

Indulgent. Profligate. Gratuitous. Excessive. Not once in the 13.8 billion years of our universe has any of these adjectives ever been directed towards a keenly priced, high-rise, mid-capacity motorcycle. These are machines that shun the extreme to embrace the middle ground, sitting at the heart of a Venn diagram of practicality, accessibility and affordability. They're lightweight yet substantial; spacious without being unwieldy; high-spec minus the daunting price tag. They're bikes that do everything – except put you in debt.

Our trio is separated by little more than £1000. Suzuki's V-Strom 800RE has already established itself as a *Bike* favourite, but a recent £800 price cut to £8899 strengthens its appeal. Triumph have added a bucketload of class-leading gadgets to its stupendously talented Tiger Sport 660, yet kept its price a fiver shy of £9k. And now Yamaha's overhauled Tracer 7 GT swaggers into the fray with new suspension, chassis and styling, plus a vast list of accessories all bundled in for its £10,104. So, which sensible bike makes the most sense?

Three of the best value all-rounders you can buy right now

Suzuki V-Strom 800RE

A slimmed-down Strom with more comfort, stronger brakes and sharper steering – and now with £800 off. What more do you need?

Above: looks only a mother could love, but that red's nice

Left: couple of hundred miles is a doddle on this perch...

Below: ...and from its 20-litre tank

9:18
TC
2
A
SDMS
1
ABS
GEAR
x1000r/min
mph
203 mile
25°c
MPG IMP
AIR

'You wouldn't feel hard done by if you were downsizing to the V-Strom,' reckons Jon Urry, briefly putting himself in the boots of someone moving on from a physical and financial whopper to something more manageable and cost-effective. 'It's substantial enough to have the air of a full-fat tourer, without ever feeling that it's too much for day-to-day riding.'

He has a point, because Suzuki designed the 800RE in such a way that it deliberately carries presence from the rider's seat. Joining their range in 2024, the RE ('Road Explorer') is a more street-focused sibling to the full-on adventure DE ('Dual Explorer'). And as far as a tarmac-munching tall-rounder goes, it's all the better for it. Shorter-travel suspension and a smaller 19in (cast) front wheel together bring the seat height 30mm closer to the ground, making it far easier to straddle. Point is, the V-Strom feels like a big bike made more accessible, not a small bike trying to stand on its tiptoes.

The V-Strom's sense of size is also evident in its weight. At 223kg fully fuelled, it's the heaviest of our trio by more than 10kg. Thankfully its also has the largest engine to push it all along. The displacement advantage from its 776cc parallel twin gives the V-Strom a clear edge over its rivals when it comes to bottom-end and midrange grunt, and with 83bhp it's the most powerful at the top end, too. It's all delivered beautifully – the throttle response is so smooth that a gentle stroke of the twistgrip makes it come across as docile and easy-going. Wind it on with some enthusiasm, however, and the Suzuki happily lifts onto its haunches and bolts.

The two-way quickshifter (fitted as standard) makes light-ish work of zipping through the ratios, and while the motor is at its best when it's kept in the midrange – between, say, 5000rpm and 6000rpm – it continues to pull strongly, revving hard towards the 9500rpm redline in every gear. Somewhere around 8500rpm, however, I get a nagging vibration through the sole of my left foot that quickly becomes annoying. Thankfully it's only really apparent when you're on the boisterous side of making progress, with no sign of irritating vibes at more typical cruising speeds.

Although it appears to have the most 'adventure' in its chassis here – that 19in front wheel and OE-specific Dunlop D614 tyres – the V-Strom has an assured, positive feel to its handling. Its steering is not the fastest, but has an accuracy that the Triumph and Yamaha can't quite match, despite their 17in fronts and sports-touring Michelins. The Suzuki is happy to be pushed hard and responds well to changes of direction, with the Showa big-piston forks and rebound-adjustable shock keeping the chassis reassuringly composed and true to your prescribed arc all the way through the turn.

Given its slightly dour general appearance (although that is a nice shade of red), it's actually quite heartening to find the V-Strom so rewarding, even illuminating, to ride. Its radially mounted Nissin brakes are never short of stopping power and have a lovely progressive bite, with plenty of feedback at the lever. The rear too is easy to dial in, whether you're using it to settle the chassis or for slow manoeuvring around town. ABS is a standard set-up (ie, not lean-sensitive) with a choice of two modes, while traction control offers three settings or can be switched off. Neither are invasive unless you make a concerted effort to call on their services.

> 'Wind it on and the Suzuki happily lifts onto its haunches and bolts'

What the V-Strom doesn't have, nor offers as an option, is cruise control. It might not have been so common when the V-Strom 800 arrived in 2023, but the fact both the Tiger Sport 660 and Tracer 7 GT now come with it as standard shows how rapidly the class is evolving. Given the Suzuki does have a ride-by-wire throttle, hopefully it's an easy addition for a future model.

Another disappointing feature is the screen. Taller and wider than the DE's, you'd expect it would offer more protection. Instead, wind whips around it to pummel the head and body from every angle, and although it is adjustable, you need to unbolt it with a Torx key to switch between the upper and lower positions. The saving grace where comfort is concerned is the seat though, which is wide, soft and accommodating enough to cradle your buttocks for hours on end. Lovely.

V-Strom serves up a storm when it's pushed. Toe dragging optional

Pay for your V-Strom 800RE

bikes.suzuki.co.uk

» CASH PRICE: £8899 (including £800 dealer contribution)

» PCP: £2500 deposit, 36 monthly payments £87.91, optional final payment £4704 (4000 miles, 8.9% APR)

» HP: £2500 deposit, 36 months £202.17, total £9778.12 (8.9% APR)

Above: also comes in colours, but they come at a cost

3152.2
40.1
78:46
N
TRIUMPH

Left: dinky dash starting to feel its age against others

Below: screen is decent, but handguards extra

Pay for your Tiger Sport 660

triumphmotorcycles.co.uk

» **CASH PRICE:** From £8995

» **PCP:** £2500 deposit, 36 monthly payments £70.99, optional final payment £4773.75 (4000 miles, 4.9% APR)

» **HP:** £2500 deposit, 36 months £194.06, total £9486.16 (4.9% APR)

Triumph Tiger Sport 660

Easy-going, mild mannered, user-friendly fun. But when the need comes to provoke it, does the Tiger roar convincingly?

Hopping from the Suzuki to the Triumph highlights the Tiger Sport 660's smaller stature. For a start, its all-up 207kg kerb weight is easily the lightest here. It's noticeable when you wheel the Tiger about and continues to be apparent when we get rolling, too. For me, it seems a tad more petite on every level, from the tiny TFT dash, slimmer bars and neater seat. But rather than feeling less substantial, it translates into a playful personality that's rich in vigour.

At 660cc, the Tiger Sport packs the smallest motor here, too. However, it does have the benefit of an extra cylinder, plus the ability to spin up to 10,250rpm where it develops 81bhp – 10bhp more than the Tracer and just a couple shy of the V-Strom. Although it has to work harder to deliver those horses, there's a turbine-like smoothness to the effervescent triple that makes keeping it fizzing at higher revs a pleasure. It doesn't fare so well where torque is concerned though, packing the lightest punch with 47lb·ft. Fuelling is well measured, and all three modes (Rain, Road and Sport) deliver drive predictably and glitch-free.

For 2025, Triumph have kitted the Tiger Sport 660 with a two-way quickshifter, which makes snicking up and down the box a breeze. Effort at the toe is noticeably less than with the Suzuki system, but in terms of operation they're on a par, which is just as important for maintaining an even keel when you're loaded with luggage, or with a pillion on board, as it is for making swift progress.

Less refined is the Tiger Sport's Showa suspension, which feels somewhat crude particularly when pushing on. It feels as if the fork springs aren't quite up to my 85kg (plus riding kit), and that's no more apparent than when setting up for a turn under hard braking, where there doesn't seem enough oomph in the return stroke to settle the chassis properly.

Paul Berryman, on the other hand, finds the Triumph the most suited to his riding style. 'Perhaps it's the way I load up the

It's a Tiger with more than a touch of friskiness about it

suspension before tipping in,' he says, and I tend to agree – he's a good chunk lighter than me, and I'm more than happy to concede he's a smoother rider, too. There's nothing to adjust on the Tiger's forks, so it's something I have to adapt to. And anyway, a gentler approach just might be to my benefit.

The rear shock (which doesn't offer any damping adjustment either) is a much better match for me and provides firm enough support while keeping the roadholding suitably plush. Extremes at the front end aside, the Tiger's a well-balanced bike that lives up to its 'Sport' moniker with aplomb, and flitting through bends with rapid changes of direction takes very little effort at all. Its Michelin Road 5 tyres are well matched to the agile, all-round package.

Brakes are Nissin, and although they're 'only' two-piston sliding calipers they're more than capable of scrubbing off speed in a confident and controlled manner. An upgrade to the electronic rider aids this year, courtesy of a six-axis IMU, means the Tiger Sport now comes with lean-sensitive cornering ABS and traction control – something neither the Yamaha nor Suzuki can boast. Nor plenty of bikes costing an awful lot more money, come to think of it. The Tiger Sport 660 also now comes with a basic cruise control system, via a single simple on/off button on the left switchgear. Just set and forget.

In terms of comfort, the broad, well-padded seat sits somewhere between the other two on test; however, both Jon (the tallest of our trio of testers) and I find the riding position cramped after a while, with little option for shifting around. On the other hand, Paul, who's only marginally shorter, was very much at home, finding the ergonomics to be bang on – so much so that he starts eyeing up the Tiger's keys at every opportunity.

The Tiger's easily adjustable screen does just enough in its highest position to deflect any disruptive airflow up and over my head. If weather protection matters, be aware that Triumph charge a further £88 for handguards and £245 for heated grips (both of which come included on the Tracer 7 GT). No option for a centrestand yet either. Still, if you prefer tech widgets to practicality then, like the Yamaha, the Tiger comes with full connectivity to link up to your smartphone via a dedicated app for music, calls and navigation.

> **'Keeping the effervescent triple fizzing at higher revs is a pleasure'**

Pay for your Tracer 7 GT

you-yamaha-finance.co.uk

» **CASH PRICE:** £10,104

» **PCP:** £2500 deposit, 36 monthly payments £124.02, optional final payment £4887.50 (4000 miles, 9.4% APR)

» **HP:** £2500 deposit, 36 months £241.87, total £11,207.32 (9.4% APR)

TRACER
7
GT
furygan
furygan

It sure is practical, but prod the Tracer and it'll still show its playful side

Yamaha Tracer 7 GT

Now with all the bells and whistles for a full Gran Turismo experience, but has the famously frisky Tracer 7 grown up too much?

It seems like only yesterday that Yamaha's cheeky MT-07 roadster gained some clothes and stretched its proportions to grow into the more practical and presentable Tracer 700. That was 2016 though, and in the near-decade since it's been polished and tweaked, lost the zeros to become the Tracer 7, and as of 2025 has evolved into a rather smart and sorted sports-tourer.

The bike we have here is the fully loaded GT model. For an extra £1300 over the base price that gets you a decent set of 30-litre hard panniers, a taller screen, heated grips, centrestand, remote preload adjuster and a 'GT Spec' seat with thicker foam. The only thing it doesn't have, and which the others here do, is a quickshifter – but if you can stretch your budget by another £188, Yamaha will be more than happy to supply one that now works both up and down the box.

Nestled within its tubular steel frame is the ever-popular 689cc CP2 parallel twin, a rorty little package that has also found its way into sports, retro and adventure bikes, by way of the R7, XSR and Ténéré. In fact, more than 400,000 of these crossplane powerplants have rolled off the production line – and it's not hard to see why customers find it so endearing.

The off-beat pulse from its 270° crank gives it the torquey timbre of a 90° V-twin, an engine note that you can't help but smile along to. A ride-by-wire throttle has been introduced for 2025, and with that comes three rider modes (Sport, Street and Custom), two levels of traction control, plus a new cruise control system that lets you trim and resume your set speed, unlike the Triumph's one-button setup.

With 72bhp on tap it's the least powerful of the three bikes, but that doesn't mean it's less involving or entertaining. The perky twin still harbours a little hooligan waiting to be called on, and although it's softer than previous incarnations it still delivers the goods when provoked into action. Threading a line between blind bends and switchbacks along the ever-glorious B664 is a simple joy, with enough thump off the gas to ping you comfortably along to the next turn. Off-throttle thrills are tamed by a new slipper clutch, which comes unobtrusively into play to smooth out the effects of aggressive engine braking.

> 'The perky twin harbours a little hooligan waiting to be called on'

The chassis on the Tracer 7 has evolved hugely for 2025, with new upside-down forks, a stiffer steel backbone frame and a 40mm-longer aluminium swingarm. The additional wheelbase should make it feel more steady and stable, and while perhaps it's robbed a pinch of the old bike's nimbleness, making it not quite as fleet of foot, it hasn't suddenly turned it into a lumbering, wayward oil tanker. The Tracer 7 is still a sharp, crisp, nimble bike to chuck about, but a touch more plushness from the new suspension (adjustable for rebound at both ends) wouldn't go amiss.

The Tracer's new radial brakes lack a bit of finesse, too. They're more than up to the job, but they're just a little bit quick

Above: Only bike here with space for your picnic

Right: where some of the extra grand over the other two goes

SPORT
1
927
0
MPH
0 2 4 6 8 10 12
x1000r/min
ODO
312 mile
COOLANT
24°C
E
F

Below: Ride-by-wire means 'Sport' now appears in the corner

to grab the disc in the initial stages of squeezing the lever.

Jon's not keen on the Tracer's seat, finding it too firm and unforgiving for distance work. He's ready to swap at the first stop, and as I climb aboard I have to agree with his initial assessment. Given it's the 'GT Spec', I'm surprised at how hard and narrow it feels – it's a bit like perching on a stack of books. But the further we ride, the happier I am on it. I'm not sure what that says about our relative posteriors, except that comfort can be a subjective sensation. Sometimes a firmer foam can be the smarter choice for all-day comfort.

These are minor negatives that we're dwelling on though, because the Tracer makes a compelling case for the all-round crown. Other 2025 upgrades include a larger fuel tank, adjustable seat height, a smarter 5-inch TFT dash, new switchgear (including Yamaha's odd see-saw indicator switch), and a tactile joystick for thumbing between menu options. Plus – and this is a pretty big deal – a windscreen that actually works.

I've struggled with Yamaha's wind protection in the past, particularly on touring models, but the Tracer 7's thicker screen does just enough to keep buffeting at bay. I'm 5ft 11in and it has to be at the topmost position of its easily adjustable height to deflect eyeball-rattling turbulence effectively, but nevertheless, it works for me. Handguards and heated grips, both fitted as standard, are welcome creature comforts, too.

Verdict

Before we can properly consider value, we need to level up the equipment across the three bikes. The Yamaha Tracer 7 GT is loaded with way more kit than the other two, so let's add a quickshifter and set the resulting £10,292 as our baseline.

Adding comparable official accessories to the Triumph Tiger Sport 660 brings its price to £10,174 – though you still can't get a centrestand or a taller touring screen for it. On the Suzuki V-Strom 800RE, you're looking at £10,745 – and you still have to live without cruise control. All in all, you'd have to say the Tracer offers both the most complete range of features, as well as the best value for money given how much you get.

Bringing it back to the bikes in front of us, the Suzuki is easily the most sensible, mature, grown-up choice. Its big-bike presence, plush suspension, 20-litre fuel tank, comfy saddle and grunty motor all work together to make your riding life easy and fuss-free. It is a fabulously useful bike, but lacks the sporty spirit and eager playfulness of the Tiger and Tracer. And while it's subjective, in this company it's not much of a looker either.

As the lightest bike here, the Tiger is the most manageable option. If you're moving up from a smaller bike, or looking to drop a capacity class or two in search of an easier life, definitely start here. That's not to say the Tracer or V-Strom are a handful, not by a long shot, but for ease of use the Triumph undoubtedly comes up trumps. That lightness also translates into fabulously nimble and engaging steering. But it's not quite the complete all-rounder, with the revviest power delivery, no option for a main stand, and a dated-looking dash. A great bike – but its 800cc Tiger Sport sibling is a massive step on in almost all areas (except the clocks) for not an awful lot more money.

So, as an overall winner, we'll be packing our lunch in the Yamaha's panniers. The Tracer strikes the best balance across the board – from the practical to the playful, from the sporty to the sophisticated, and from its accessibility to its affordability. Enjoyable to ride, well finished and with the versatility for both everyday use and long-distance touring, the Tracer 7 GT is a grin-twinkling compromise that really can do it all.

'The Tracer strikes the best balance across the board'

SPECIFICATIONS	SUZUKI V-STROM 800RE	TRIUMPH TIGER SPORT 660	YAMAHA TRACER 7 GT
Contact	bikes.suzuki.co.uk	triumphmotorcycles.co.uk	yamaha-motor.eu
Price (on the road)	£8899 (including £800 dealer contribution)	from £8995	£10,104
Capacity	776cc	660cc	689cc
Engine	8v DOHC parallel twin	12v DOHC inline triple	4v DOHC parallel twin
Bore x stroke	84 x 70mm	74 x 51.1mm	80 x 68.6mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain
Power (claimed)	83bhp @ 8500rpm	81bhp @ 10,250rpm	72bhp @ 8750rpm
Torque (claimed)	58lb·ft @ 6800rpm	47lb·ft @ 6250rpm	50lb·ft @ 6500rpm
Frame	Tubular steel	Tubular steel perimeter	Tubular steel backbone
Front suspension	41mm usd forks, adjustable preload	41mm usd forks, no adjustment	41mm usd forks, adjustable rebound
Rear suspension	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound	monoshock, adjustable preload	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 310mm discs, four-piston calipers / 260mm disc, two-piston caliper	2 x 310mm discs, two-piston calipers / 255mm disc, single-piston caliper	2 x 298mm discs, four-piston calipers / 245mm disc, single-piston caliper
Tyres (f/r)	110/80 R19 / 150/70 R17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17
Rake/trail	26°/124mm	23.1°/97mm	25.2°/99mm
Wheelbase	1515mm	1418mm	1495mm
Kerb weight	223kg	207kg	212kg
Seat height	825mm	835mm	845/865mm
Tank size	20 litres	17.2 litres	18 litres
Economy	47mpg	49mpg	49mpg
Electronics	ABS, traction control, riding modes, up/down quickshifter	Cornering ABS, traction control, riding modes, up/down quickshifter, cruise control	ABS, traction control, riding modes, cruise control
***Bike* rating**	8/10	8/10	9/10

660
TIGER
SUZUKI
800

Has electric found its place?

The **Stark Varg EX** is a road-legal enduro that leaves 450s in its dust. It's unreal

By **Carl Stevens** Photography **Adam Shorrock**

'Arkenstone' dash is a military grade, removable Android phone that offers heaps of features

Switchgear is far easier to use than it looks

Forget everything you think you know about electric bikes. In fact, forget this menacing-looking enduro machine is even powered by electricity rather than internal combustion. I want you to read on with zero preconceptions, as I'm going to explain why the Stark Varg EX isn't just an incredible bit of kit but is an equivalent to, and in some ways better than, its petrol alternatives. Yes, seriously.

It's not just us who think this way. Spanish brand Stark are making waves across the globe, with incredible racing and sales success with their Varg crosser. It's kicking arse on the track, and they're selling as many as they can make.

And now there's this road-legal EX enduro too, with an insane amount of power (80bhp, whereas a 450cc sits under the 60hp mark), comparable weight (less than 10kg heavier than a 450cc) and a claimed battery life of up to six hours. So, does the Varg EX deliver on its promises?

Does it last?

That answer depends on how brutal you are with your right wrist. But for a session of slow-speed enduro with the odd blat between trails, two hours of continuous riding drained 64 per cent of the battery. On a big, open motocross track, four 15-minute sessions hard on the 'gas' left it on 20 per cent, without a single recharge.

Point is, the 7.2kWh battery outlasts most riders. It charges bloody quickly too – in less than two hours. Plus, the charger sits neatly in the MX-style stand so it doesn't look out of place when it's hooked up to an outlet.

Is it really that fast?

It makes a 450cc bike feel like a 125. It's so fast in full-power mode that in an off-road environment, the Varg EX feels more rapid than a superbike on steroids. It will spin up to 60mph, and wheelie at 70mph off the throttle. Yet it can be dialled to have any level of power from 10bhp upwards, with the amount of battery regeneration (which feels like engine braking) available to dial in, too. With five maps to customise, it's super-easy to flick between power and regen on the go.

But surely it's heavy and feels weird?

It's as heavy as a 450, so absolutely not. It feels like a typical enduro bike and looks classy up close, with incredible attention to detail and seriously quality components. And the 'Arkenstone' dash is a removable Android phone!

You may worry that a lack of engine inertia and moving parts will feel foreign, but it makes no difference, whether firing out of a rut, lining up an obstacle or balancing while airborne. The Stark never feels odd.

Are there any riding benefits with electric?

Surprisingly, quite a few. Riding enduro (and especially motocross) is hard work on the body and the mind, but the Stark makes riding accurately easier and less stressful on the body. There's no clutch or gears, which means you can never be in the wrong gear or stall mid-corner at an inopportune moment – which is tough to keep on top of after a few hours straddling the saddle.

Because there's no clutch, it allows for a rear brake lever where you'd usually find the clutch lever – meaning you can always keep the balls of your feet on the pegs, where they offer the most control, and brake into right-handers when you have your leg out.

Then there's the lack of vibration through the bars, which is something that accelerates arm pump when you're hanging on off-road; with the Stark, I can muster double the seat time, at a solid pace without feeling anywhere near as fatigued.

It's sublime. *Bike*

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £11,990 **Engine** permanent magnet AC motor **Power** 80bhp **Torque** 66lb·ft **Top speed** 90mph (est) **Rake/trail** 26.1°/n/a **Wheelbase** 1488mm **Weight** 120kg (claimed) **Seat height** 990mm **Battery capacity** 7.2kWh **Economy** Err… **Colours** Stark Red, Forest Grey, Snow White **Availability** In showrooms now

***Bike* verdict** The Stark Varg EX isn't just good, it's move-the-goalposts exceptional. Sure, it's missing the noise and the smell, but it's a tiny price to pay for such a complete package – and it goes long enough, too.

***Bike* rating 10/10**

‘It will spin up to 60mph, and wheelie at 70mph off the throttle’

Stark Varg EX takes electric to new heights

‘Liberty want to invest in MotoGP to bring it to more people’

US media giant Liberty have bought MotoGP rights holder Dorna. What does this mean for the future of motorcycling’s biggest championship? Dorna chief commercial officer **Dan Rossomondo** lays out Liberty’s vision

By **Mat Oxley** Photography **Dorna, Harley-Davidson, HRC, Oxley, Tech3, Yamaha**

In case you hadn’t noticed, sport is big business these days. Huge business. So it was only a matter of time before big business came for MotoGP.

In fact, top-level sport has always been about business. Here’s Aussie MotoGP star ‘Happy’ Jack Ahearn (nicknamed for his grumpy demeanour) remembering negotiating his pay with race promoters in the 1950s.

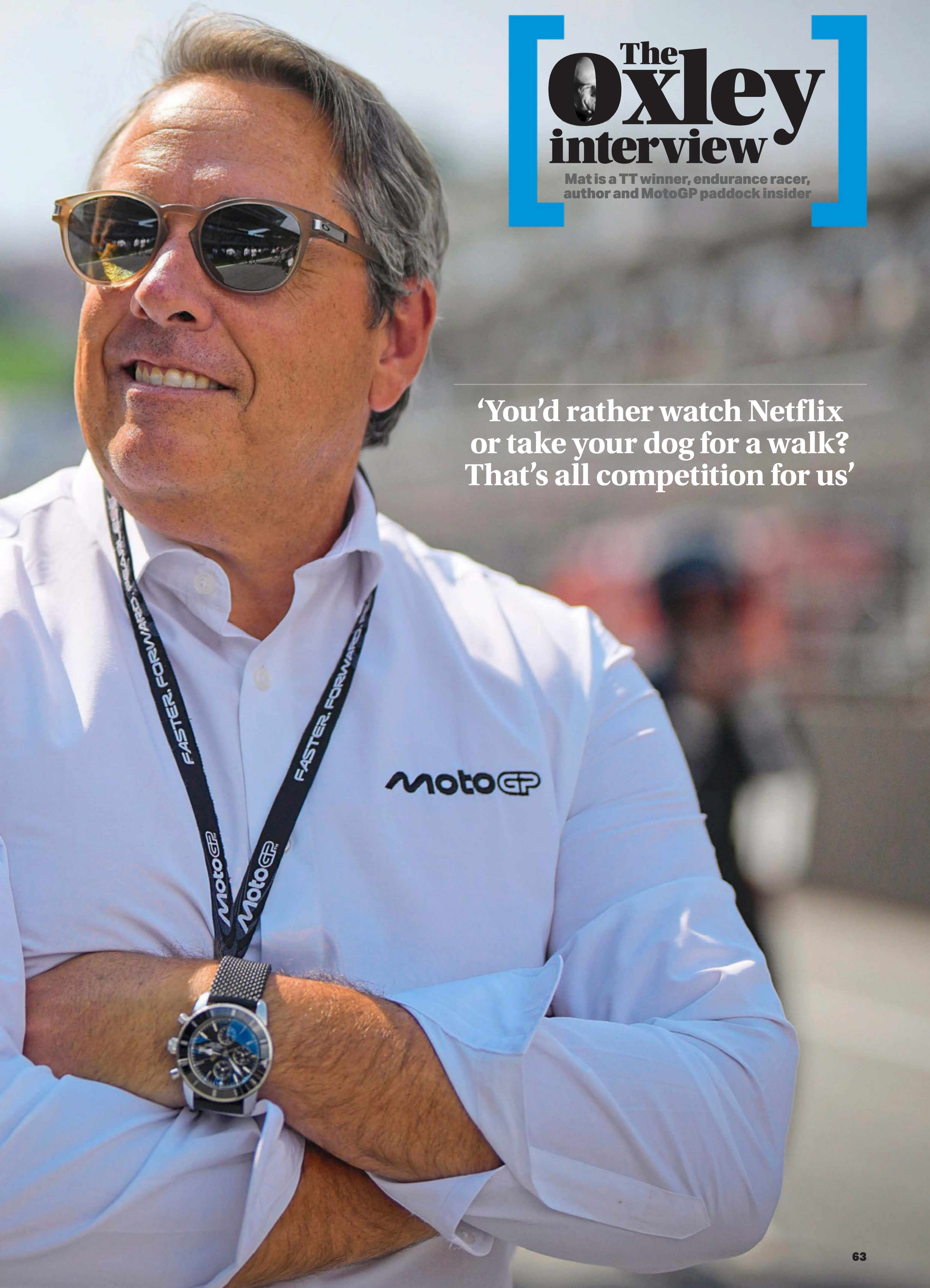
‘Always, if you didn’t watch them, they’d try and dud you,’ he said. ‘They used to divide us into first-class and second-class riders. I was always classed with the top blokes, but at this meeting the bloody secretary wouldn’t give me the £100 first-class money, he wanted to give me bloody half that for second class. I said no bloody way, but he wouldn’t pay, so I hung him out of the window. I think we were on the second floor.’

And here’s Mike Trimby – who did more than anyone to steer MotoGP onto the road of becoming a modern, pan-global sport – recalling doing business with Formula 1 mogul Bernie Ecclestone, who briefly owned MotoGP in the early 1990s.

‘Bernie should hope that I am never diagnosed with terminal cancer because, were that to happen, he would not see the dawn,’ said Trimby. In other words, big business is dirty business. How could it be otherwise with billions and billions up for grabs?

Last July, American mass-media company Liberty Media finalised its acquisition of MotoGP rights holder Dorna, for £3.75 billion. Eight years earlier Liberty bought Formula 1 for slightly less than that and they recently rejected a £15 billion offer for the championship, so they’ve grown F1’s worth by

MotoGP or walking the dog? MotoGP every day for Dan Rossomondo


FASTER. FORWARD.
FASTER. FORWARD.
MotoGP
MotoGP
MotoGP

The Oxley interview

Mat is a TT winner, endurance racer, author and MotoGP paddock insider

‘You’d rather watch Netflix or take your dog for a walk? That’s all competition for us’

MotoGP
TAKEOFF PARTY
QATAR AIRWAYS

Rossomondo (second right) and the Dorna management team aiming to make MotoGP take off

A temple launch to the 2025 season in Thailand. Liberty's aim is for millions more to worship them like we do

500 per cent. Liberty – now worth £45 billion – want to do the same to MotoGP. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? It's neither, really – it's merely inevitable.

Some MotoGP fans fear Liberty are going transform the pinnacle of motorcycling racing into something entirely different, like a trashy wrestling show, or an F1-style luxury-brands marketing vehicle. Dorna's chief commercial officer Dan Rossomondo says that isn't going to happen.

'Some people are worried Liberty are going to change MotoGP, but why would they do that when they've paid a lot of money for something they think is very good?' he insists.

'Liberty want to invest in MotoGP to bring it to more people. The key factor we need to solve is what's the thing that hooks in new fans? I don't want to overcomplicate this – it's how do we make MotoGP more available, more discoverable.

'Liberty know MotoGP isn't Formula 1 but they do have a lot of expertise, not just in this business – they're in the media business, they're in the music business and they're in the ticketing business. So we can tap into their expertise across that entire spectrum.'

Liberty's ownership of F1 is already helping MotoGP, by leveraging elements of their F1 property to shine a light on the lesser-known world of two-wheel racing.

Recently they helped former F1 team boss Guenther Steiner take over the Tech3 MotoGP team, founded by Hervé Poncharal in the 1980s. Steiner gained a massive following among F1 fans for his sweary appearances in the championship's hugely popular *Drive to Survive* docuseries, so Liberty's hope is that he will encourage followers of F1 to take a look at MotoGP.

And, surprise, surprise, F1 drivers Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen are now reported to be following Steiner's lead and looking at buying their own stakes in MotoGP teams. This is all part of the plan to create a MotoGP gold rush, pumping up the championship's value.

Will F1 and MotoGP become competitors, owned by the same masters? Rossomondo doesn't see it like that – he doesn't believe that MotoGP competes for fans with other motorsport series or even other sports…

'We are competing for time,' he says. 'You'd rather watch Netflix than MotoGP? Or watch football instead of MotoGP, or take your dog for a walk? That's all competition for us.

'In much of the world we have more leisure time than ever before, which is why sports and entertainment are proliferating, so we are competing for how people spend their time. I want to attract a much larger audience to MotoGP, because it's such a visceral, evocative sport.

'We do a great job telling the racing stories, but we want to be storytellers beyond that. The riders are gladiators and the casual fan wants to know about their lives and their lifestyles. We have to lift the visor on these guys.'

This, therefore, is the dark arts of marketing and social media algorithms. How to take your sport viral, so it's pinging on people's phones from Manchester to Mumbai and from Rio de Janeiro to Riyadh.

There's little doubt MotoGP deserves to be bigger. We all know motorcycle racing is an awesome sport, that riders like Marc Márquez and Fabio Quartararo are 21st-century gladiators and that places like Jerez and Le Mans are modern-day coliseums. It's the goal of Rossomondo and Dorna's new marketing boss Kelly Brittain to somehow communicate this to more people. And to give you an idea of the scale of their challenge, Dorna only recently created their own marketing department, whereas the marketing department at Brittain's previous employers – Red Bull F1 – numbers 110 people.

Attracting new fans will make MotoGP better in various ways. We all know that packed grandstands are better than empty grandstands, which is why races like Jerez and Le Mans give you goosebumps, while Silverstone and COTA don't. More fans also means more money, which Liberty want and MotoGP desperately needs.

‘I want to attract a much larger audience to MotoGP, because it’s such a visceral, evocative sport’

It’s anything but easy – but getting that across on TV is a challenge

Around half the MotoGP grid are probably the world’s worst-paid elite athletes. Most factory riders earn a few million, but few independent-team riders earn more than a few hundred grand. The situation is even worse in Moto2 and Moto3, where many teams are struggling for survival, which forces them to hire riders who pay teams for the privilege of racing in MotoGP’s hard-fought support classes. That shouldn’t be happening at the top of the sport. Rossomondo’s job is to fix this problem through his marketing and business roles.

‘The marketing side of my job as chief commercial officer is, how do we expose this great sport to more people without losing who we are?’ he says. ‘Eighty per cent of our fans are what we call purists, so how do we get more, what we call, tourists to watch a few races, follow us on Instagram and so on?

‘The business side of my job is how do we then make money out of our 540 million fans? How do we manage our media rights better? How do we bring in more corporate partners? How do we do more licensing deals? How we do build a sustainable digital model?’

Dorna recently announced a major new corporate partner in Harley-Davidson, which will race its baggers – touring Harleys converted into unlikely race bikes – at six of next year’s MotoGP rounds. Some fans love the idea of having something completely different at MotoGP events – ‘so wrong it’s right’ – while others believe this is some kind of heresy, a grievous sin against the sanctity of grand prix purism.

‘We had been talking to Harley for a while,’ Rossomondo continues. ‘They want to get back to motor racing culture. They think it’s part of their DNA [Harley created its first factory team 110 years ago – Ed] and they think they’d gotten away from that. They also want to be more global and they want to be younger. To us they’re Americana, so that’s bringing in a different culture to MotoGP.’ Purists and tourists…

If corporate partners and licensing deals sound very F1, Dorna have been copying F1 for a decade or two, trying to make MotoGP more fan-friendly by shrinking the performance gap between the front and back of the grid, introducing TV-friendly qualifying formats, adding Saturday sprint races and moving sprint podiums closer to the fans, allowing them to join the prosecco party on Saturday afternoons.

‘We had defaulted, incorrectly, to thinking the fans at the circuits were the promoters’ customers, not ours,’ says Rossomondo. ‘But that can’t be, because they’re our fans, so we have to take greater ownership of the fans at the venues, which is why we’ve started introducing things inside the venues, like the sprint podiums and fan vision, where fans can interact on the big screens.’

Rossomondo’s a New Yorker and previously worked in the NBA – so he’s well used to colourful and vibrant worlds

Rossomondo – an affable New Yorker with Italian blood – has worked in sports promotion and marketing since he left college, mostly in NBA. He was headhunted by Dorna in 2023, when he made his first visit to a MotoGP round, the Grand Prix of the Americas at COTA.

‘My 17-year-old son came with me,’ he recalls. ‘We got out onto the pit wall and he said to me, “How is a human being even sat on those things?!” I was wildly impressed by the whole operation – they’d raced in Argentina a couple of weeks before and they were going to Spain next. But what really grabbed me was watching the bikes, that just took my breath away.

‘One big things other sports are envious about is that we own our own production. We produce it, so we can dictate what it looks like. One of the things we are always wrestling with is that sometimes I think our TV makes MotoGP look too easy.’

Rossomondo is 100 per cent correct on this point. Some years ago Dorna introduced on-bike gyro cameras that move in sync with the motorcycle when it leans, so viewers don’t see the bike flick left and right, which makes bike racing look like car racing. What’s the point of that?

MDOT_SEASON
TOY
TOY

‘Harley want to get back to motor racing culture. They think it’s part of their DNA’

Harley bagger racing: brilliant, bonkers, and booming around Silverstone in ’26

Jerez: a full house every year. Now imagine every race like this…

‘We have to give people the real feel of MotoGP. One thing we can do a better job of is making it louder. We dampen the sound on the broadcast and to me the sound is a huge part of the visceral feeling.’ Might this also explain why Dorna are replacing the stifled whir of MotoE with the boom of baggers next year?

There are other parts of the MotoGP action that Rossomondo hopes will improve, even though they’re beyond his remit.

‘I’m not a technical guy but we knew we had to do something to the rules to get the racing back to when it was more exciting.’

At the end of next year MotoGP will undergo its biggest tech shake-up since the switch to four strokes in 2002. The new bikes will use 850cc engines, downforce aero will be reduced, and gizmos like ride-height devices will be banned. It’s hoped these changes will create better racing, with more overtaking.

Inevitably, Liberty are already making enemies in some corners of the paddock. They want MotoGP to copy F1 by only counting premier-class titles. Thus Marc Márquez is a seven-time champion, not nine. For the same reason Liberty want to segregate the MotoGP paddock from Moto2 and Moto3, which will have their garages in the paddock, not in pit lane.

What will happen to ticket prices and TV packages, given how these increased in F1 since Liberty’s takeover? Between 2019 and 2024 the price of a British F1 GP ticket increased by around 120 per cent – five times the rate of UK inflation. Why? Because Liberty grew F1 so well that demand increased, with Silverstone weekends a sell-out. When demand exceeds supply, prices rise.

If Liberty are unsure how to proceed with MotoGP they should consider what happened when Ecclestone muscled his way into MotoGP in the 1990s. At that time the German GP at Hockenheim was a huge success, so Ecclestone jacked up ticket prices and within two years the event was dead. Motorcyclists don’t like being taken for a ride.

If you’re wishing for MotoGP to remain unchanged, you’re living in fantasyland. Corporate giants rule the modern world, enjoying more power than many governments, and they are greedy for profits. That’s just the way it is.

Consider British Superbikes. Until this year you could watch BSB live on Eurosport for £7 a month. Now you have to pay four times more, because Eurosport was swallowed up by TNT Sports, part of the US’s £100 billion Warner Bros Discovery media conglomerate. Billionaires like their private jets and super-yachts – and they want us to buy them. Bike

NEXT ISSUE Superbike legend turned jungle king **Carl Fogarty** celebrates 30 years since his first WSB double

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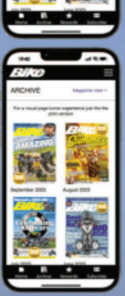

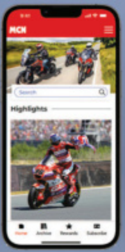

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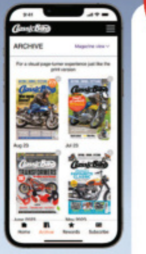

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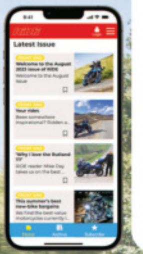

ALLEN MILLYARD 'WILL THE V8 ROAR IN LONDON?'
MCN
SPEED REFINED
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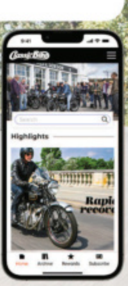
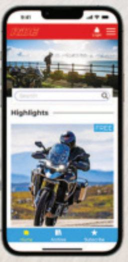
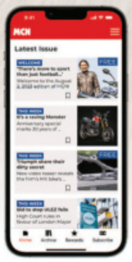
TIGER'S GRR-EAT
Why Triumph's brilliant new 798cc triple has given the Tiger Sport more bite
SPORTY STEALS
KTM boss replaced
Going the distance







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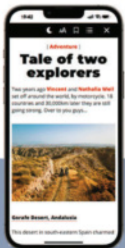

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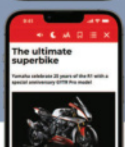

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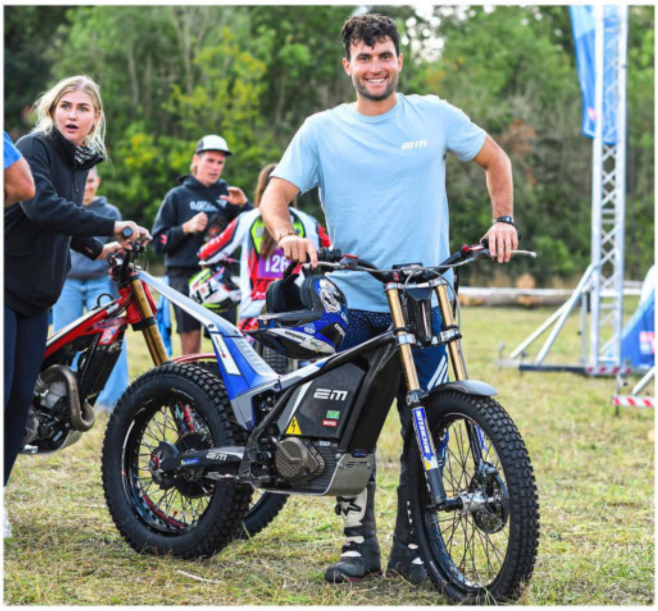
[Inside] TrialGP

After seven years away, the planet's best trials riders returned to the UK in September. *Bike* was there to watch physics get defied, gravity be defeated, and the greatest of all time earn his 38th world title

By **Greg Moss** Photography **Greg Moss, Honda**

At Peace with the madness

» Top British rider Jack Peace makes a clean run in front of a cheering home crowd, in the grounds of Boughton House in Northamptonshire. 'You have to ride so precisely,' explains the Sherco rider. 'If you make a mistake, you have very little time – you have to adjust yourself really quickly to get yourself back inline.' Peace is too busy to ponder on the treacherous terrain. 'To be honest you're thinking more about technique; you don't think about what could go wrong. On certain bits I'll look back and think "that looks mad", especially when you have a good catcher.'



The future has arrived

Electric bikes are starting to make a big impact on trials. The EM Epure Factor-e has a hydraulic clutch, four gears, and massive instant torque that's completely tunable. You can alter the power and how you'd like it delivered using an app, to make it ride like a two-stroke, a four-stroke, or exactly as you want it.

They start 'em young

'I've been doing this since I was nine,' says 16-year-old Holly Dixon, competing in the Trial2 women's class. 'In the trials world it's not that young – as soon as people open their eyes they have a bike. This is my first season on the world stage, and it's not been as great as I hoped. The class is so tight, if you make a silly mistake you'll drop down so many places. It's like a mind game.'

TRIAL GP
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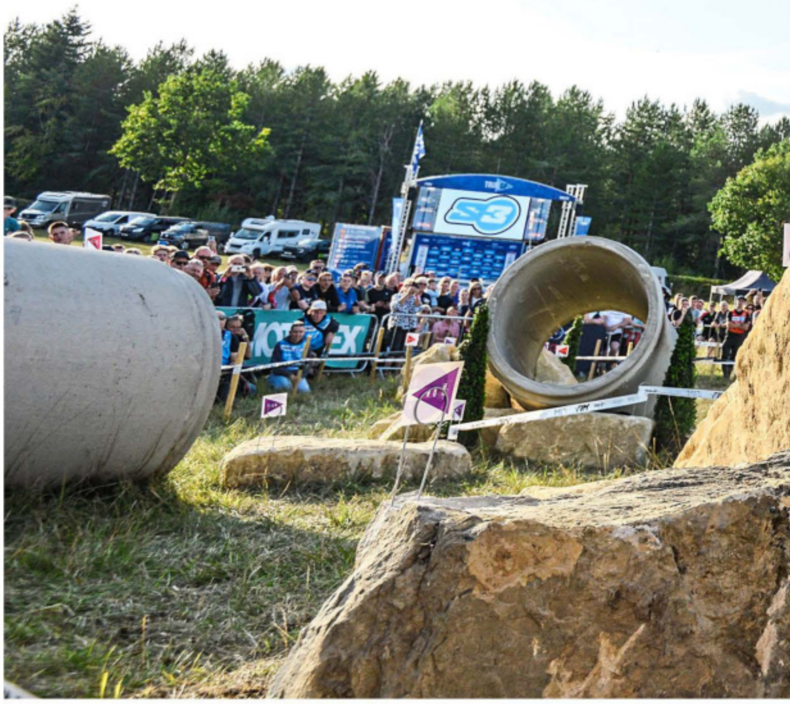
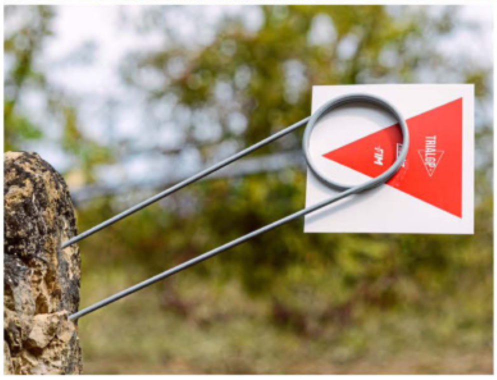
Hertz
430

Un-Bou-lievable

World number one Toni Bou, from Spain, launches his 300cc Montesa COTA 4RT from one boulder to the next in the Power Section. This is a single stage of the trial at the end of each day where the top riders race, one at a time, to complete a section in the quickest time. It's a firm favourite with the crowds, mixing speed and skill, and riders going all out leading to big jumps and sketchy moments.

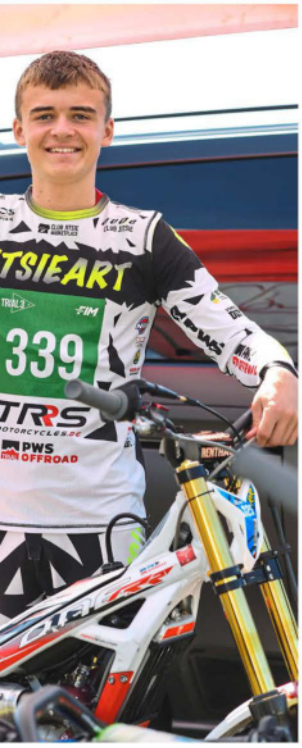




Marking the way

Drilled into the rocks are these section markers that define the course. Each class in the trial has its own route on each section, designated by colour. The higher the class, the harder the route gets. Red markers are for the GP riders, the world's best. If riders stray from the route and ride outside or round a marker, or damage the marker, they're hit with five penalty points – that's the worst score you can get.

‘Riders go all-out leading to big jumps and sketchy moments’

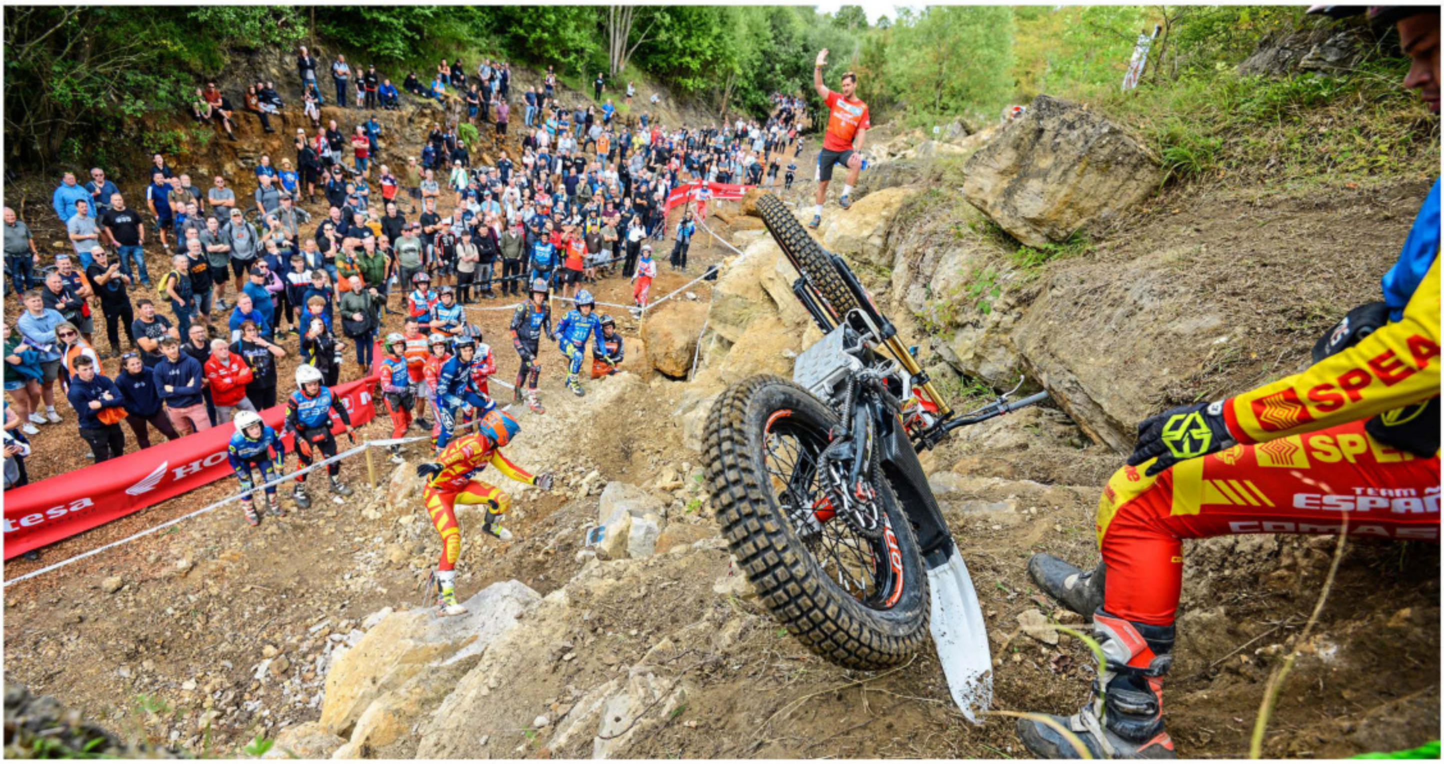


Taking a big step up

« Meet 16-year-old Lennox Schlosser from Germany, riding a 125cc TRS in the Trial3 class. ‘This is my first world round this year. It’s very tough mentally. The stages really differ from country to country. In San Marino there were big steps and long sections, which made it really hard to stay in the time limit. I prefer to ride big steps with full gas – but not too big because the 125 doesn’t have enough power!’

Gender balance

» Scorpa rider Berta Abellan [number 121] from Spain chats with fellow riders before the build-up to the Power Section. The paddock has a laid-back atmosphere and supportive vibe, with dedicated high-profile classes for women in both TrialGP and Trial2. Abellan, five times a runner-up, secured her first TrialGP world championship title on the final day after a tie-break with rival Andrea Sofia Rabino.



What goes up might come down

Spanish rider Pau Dinares takes a backwards tumble. Despite the courses being jaw-droppingly steep, crashes are rare. If a bike is damaged it's the minder's job to repair it there and then as best they can. Dan Hemingway, seasoned rider and minder to his son Harry, recalls a hairy moment earlier in the season. 'In San Marino this year, Harry crashed off a step into a 6ft water pool. I had to jump in, find the bike, fish it out and strip the carburettor to try to fix it. We got it going but it had taken on that much water it had filled the crankcase. Harry limped it to the end, but it gave up on the final section. It dropped him from fourth to 13th. Luckily Harry took it on the chin and recovered.'

Exhausting work

Trials bikes certainly don't have the loudest exhaust pipes, but the FIM still makes sure they meet regulations. The noise limit is 103dB for two-strokes and 105dB for four-strokes. Not something electric trials bikes have to worry about…

Vertical integration

Matteo Grattarola, from Italy, sends his 300cc Beta vertical. To climb steep steps riders have to unleash themselves like a coiled spring with perfect timing, as veteran Dougie Lampkin explains. 'If you're preparing for a step the first thing is to compress the suspension, then it's body position, clutch and throttle. If you start and get a slight bit of lean on, that could be enough to ruin it. You'll see the top riders hit everything so square, so precise. When you start leaning, that's when you get out of position. What looks like a problem someone has at the top might well have started when they set off at the bottom.'

I could be so good for you…

'I'm minding for Nikita Smith' says Callum Williamson. 'Minders are there to keep our rider on point, control the time and line them up, putting them in the best spot. We're there to catch the bikes and help with mechanical problems, too. It's a big job to keep a rider going for the weekend.'

One minute to win it

Observers have to keep an eye on their stopwatches, too. Each section must be completed in 60 seconds – quite a feat given the obstacles each rider must face while trying to not put a foot down. If a rider fails to complete a section in the minute, they receive the full five penalty points.

‘Tyre pressures might fluctuate between 4psi and 4.35psi’

Under pressure

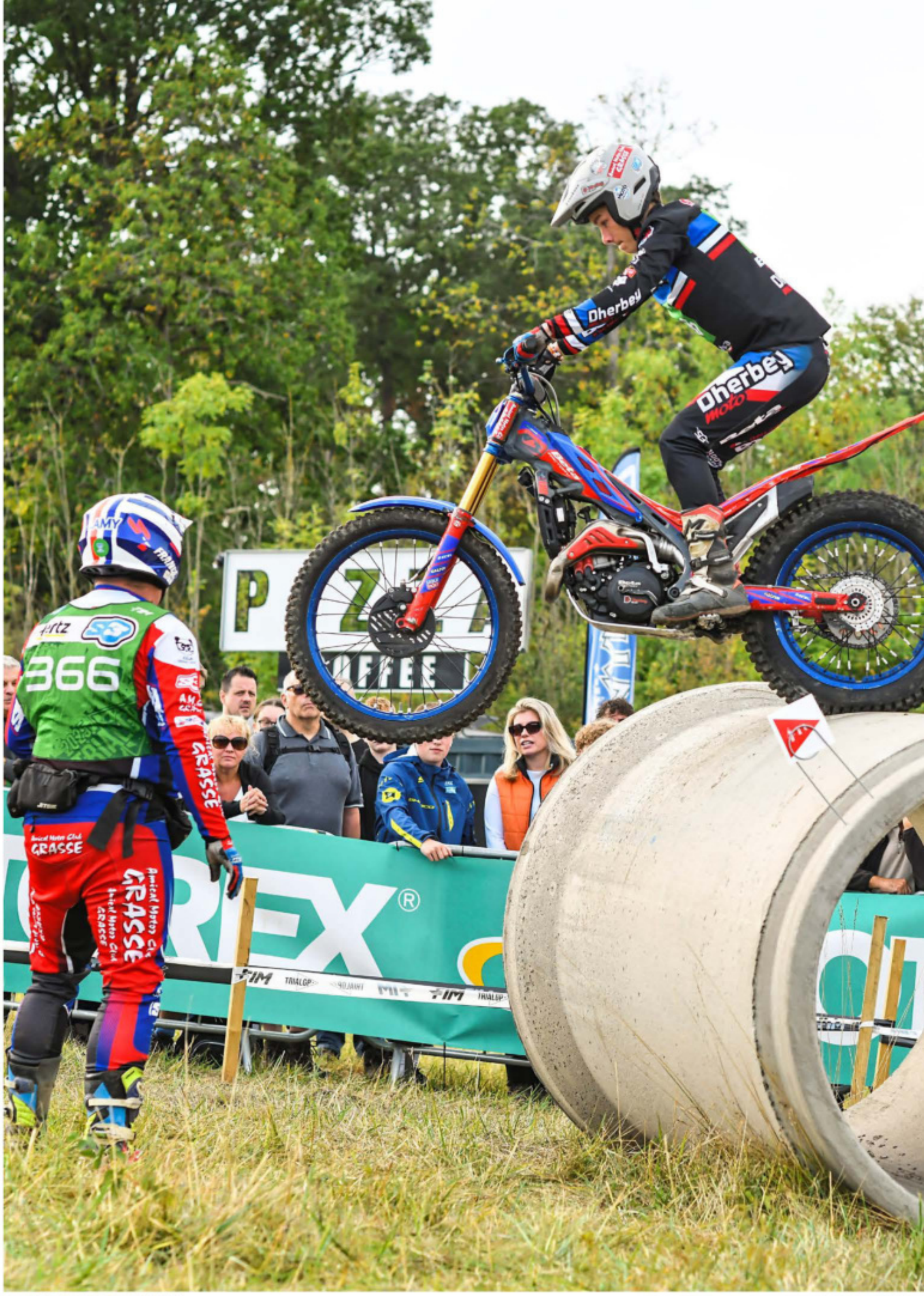
Grip and tyre pressure are key to a good performance in trials. There’s only one tyre that all riders use, no matter the conditions, as Dan Hemingway explains. ‘We might be the only motorsport that has one tyre that does all. The Michelin is by far the best and it has been for probably 30 to 40 years. We might change tyre pressures a little bit, but you fluctuate between 4psi and 4.35psi. If it gets very, very hot you might change the tyre onto a new wheel, because the sidewalls can go a little bit soft. As a minder it’s our job to make sure that tyre pressure is correct at every section without fail.’

Pipe dreams

Ivan Alzial, from France, lines his bike up for the daunting drop off a huge concrete tube. All, hopefully, while keeping his feet on the pegs. The rules of trials are pretty straightforward: try to not put a foot down and get a clean run. It works on a points system, so if you put a foot down once you get one point; twice is two points; three times and it's three points. Fall off, crash or put your foot down again and you'll receive the maximum of five penalty points – essentially, you'll have failed the section.

It's a long way to the top

The world's top riders look up at a section so sheer and high that minders can only ascend the top using a rope. To outsiders, it looks terrifying. 'For me it's second nature,' says Trial2 champ Harry Hemingway. 'I've been on a bike since I was two years old, I had a little Oset electric trials bike. We have minders who are there to catch the bike – and us if we need it. It's high-risk, but it's what we do every day so you get used to it.'



Riding while injured

Nikita Smith from Yorkshire winds her way up one of the final sections. 'I'm 28 years old. I started competing when I was six. I haven't ridden for a number of years, but because it's my home round I thought I'd come and give it a go. It's mentally tough and I'm carrying a bit of an injury. I've got pulled or torn ligaments in my wrist from where I had an unlucky crash. I've had quite a few injuries in the sport over the years.'

Checks and balances

Scrutineering before the weekend's riding. Each bike is inspected to ensure they meet FIM safety standards. Staff ensure guards are correct and in place, that throttles snap back when released, and that each bike has a lanyard fitted to the kill switch to cut the engine if a rider falls. Each frame and engine are marked with a unique number and sticker to ensure these aren't replaced over the weekend.

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Hertz
CHIEF OBSERVER 12

Feeling deflated

◀ Minder Jamie Millers attempts to fix a puncture on Jack Peace's Sherco. 'It was a brand new tyre for the event and on the third section there was a big step,' explains Millers. 'The puncture was right against the side of the rim. I couldn't quite fix it, so in the end Jack had the wheel and tyre off my bike. Our bikes are exactly the same so we can swap parts. This is my ninth season. At the beginning it was stressful, but now I have a better idea what problems I might face and what's gonna be thrown at me.'

Bou-rilliant

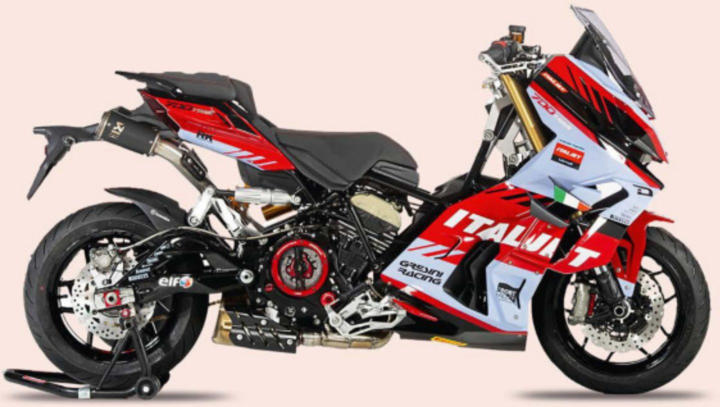
▲▼ HRC rider Toni Bou is drenched in fizz as he celebrates becoming world champion for a staggering 38th time. Since 2007 he's won every world championship he has competed in – 19 outdoor TrialGP titles and 19 indoor X-Trial titles. 'It's always difficult to sleep when you reach a world title,' says Bou. 'And then you just want to win more!'

Go there...

The FIM X-Trial (indoor) championship runs during winter – check out x-trial.com. It's heading to Leeds on 24 January 2026. TrialGP will return to Great Britain from 24-26 July 2026, but the venue shifts to Anglesey in north Wales – take a look at trialgp-anglesey.com for ticket info.

TONI BOU
38
THIRTY-EIGHT CONSECUTIVE TIMES
WORLD CHAMPION
Repsol Honda HRC
TEAM MANAGER 1

Mad fun or just plain madness?



Italjet's **Dragster 700 Twin**: Öhlins, Brembos, Akras, Márquez paint. Are they high?

By **Alan Dowds** Photography **Italjet**

It's my first time visiting the legendary Imola circuit. Ducati, Bimota, Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini are all based round this way. As are Italjet. A boutique bike maker with plenty of two-wheeled heritage, it was set up in the 1960s by Leopoldo Tartarini and built a range of unique machinery powered by diverse powerplants; from CZ two-stroke singles to Triumph Bonneville twins.

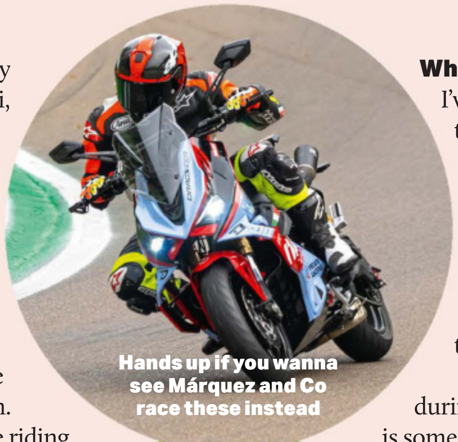
It's another unique bike I'm here to wrestle around Imola – their new Dragster 700 Twin. Its steel trellis space frame has a scooter-style riding position and semi-step-through chassis, but is connected to a 692cc parallel twin, conventional manual gearbox and chain final drive. Running gear is top-end stuff too: fully adjustable Marzocchi 50mm USD forks, Öhlins shock, Brembo radial calipers and Pirelli Diablo Rosso rubber. It even has Alex Márquez paintwork and mini-me MotoGP-style Akrapovic silencers.

Remind me what a Dragster is?

You'll probably remember it as a city scooter from the late 1990s with a skeletal steel tube space frame, single-sided swingarm front suspension, and snappy 19bhp two-stroke Gilera engine on the 180 version. Festooned with expansion chambers and intake kits, they dinged their way into the sides of black taxis with aplomb.

Where does the 700 engine come from?

It's a sign of the times that the 2025 Dragster gets its engine from China, not Italy. It's a version of the unit used in Benelli's TRK702 adventure bike (see p83). Italjet production is global, with R&D in Italy and manufacture in Thailand, Indonesia and China, so the partnership with QJMotor, which owns Benelli, makes sense. Italjet boss Massimo Tartarini says he sees a big future for Chinese bike firms in the same way as Japanese brands in the early 1970s.



Hands up if you wanna see Márquez and Co race these instead

Sure to get all the attention outside the chippy

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £12,100 (premium edition), £13,800 (Gresini rep) **Engine** 692cc DOHC 8v parallel twin **Power** 68bhp **Torque** 52lb·ft **Top speed** 118mph **Rake/trail** TBC **Wheelbase** 1553mm **Dry weight** 190kg (claimed) **Seat height** 815mm **Tank size** 16 litres **Economy** 65mpg (claimed) **Colours** black/yellow, black/red/white, Gresini rep **Availability** November

***Bike* verdict** We're glad the Dragster 700 Twin exists. It looks fabulous, goes pretty well, and is like nothing else out there. Fans of the outlandish will grab one of these – and love it.

***Bike* rating 7/10**

What's it like round a track?

I've ridden a few scooters round tracks in the past and it's fair to say the Italjet works remarkably well for such a weird-looking machine. The premium suspension helps, of course, as does the fairly light 190kg dry mass and the quality Pirelli tyres. There's decent ground clearance, the brakes are strong and, once you adjust to the riding position, it's a proper laugh.

Despite a broad range of skills on show during the launch event no one crashes, which is some testament to the Dragster's capability. The engine is down on power for such a big track, and we're left wanting more urge on the long uphill sections. Having said that, 68bhp is good for a claimed 118mph, which is probably enough for something on 15in rims.

What is missing is a quickshifter – the engine management has a conventional cable throttle rather than ride-by-wire, making a modern up/down shifter impossible. You do get a 'track' riding mode though with switchable ABS and traction control.

Does it make sense as a scooter for the road?

Not really. There's no underseat storage or fairing pockets, and you'll need to nail-gun your top box mount to the seat unit's aerodynamic fins. There's no cruise control, and the radical bodywork is full of vents and winglets that'll make it a damp affair on the wet Wednesday commute through Stoke.

There is a decent tech package though: colour dash, tyre pressure monitor, Bluetooth and built-in front/rear video cameras. Keyless ignition helps security, but it will be a massive scrote magnet; we'd not be parking this in town without some serious security.

Finally, the manual gearbox and exposed chain final drive means you lose some everyday scooter convenience.

‘Once you adjust to the riding position, it’s a proper laugh’

DRAGSTER
700TWIN
ITALJET
GRESINI RACING
elf
brembo
IMOLA

First away from the lights on the city commute every time. If you ever see one…

La dolce vita

Six spectacular days, 200 vintage motorcycles and nearly 1000 miles of gorgeous Italian scenery. Weeks on two wheels don't come much better than the Motogiro d'Italia

By **Jeff Buchanan** Photography **Motogiro / Roberto Brodolini**

There are worse fates than to be lost in Italy on a new Benelli, I suppose. That's what I keep telling myself as I wander the roads outside Verucchio, slightly panicking that I haven't seen another rider for a while and have probably veered off course.

A meandering tree-lined road eventually guides me towards the ancient hilltop village. More than a hundred vintage motorcycles are parked on its cobblestoned main square, riders sharing tales from the road while enjoying treats presented to them by locals. Yes, there are definitely worse fates.

Welcome to the 2025 Motogiro d'Italia, a six-day celebration of vintage motorcycles set in a succession of stunning Adriatic landscapes. Understandably, it attracts riders from all over the globe. This year almost 200 enthusiasts are taking part, some from as far as the US, Canada, Argentina and Australia. Participants may not share a language but they share a passion.

Everyone has a story about why they ride what they do, whether it's a cherished Motobi, an ardently maintained MV Agusta or a long-sought Ducati. There may be a prized family Moto Morini handed down through the generations. And it's not only Italian bikes – there are Nortons and BSAs, too. Whatever the bike and the brand, behind each bike is a sentimental story.

The Motogiro unfolds as a moving vintage motorcycle show, with famed machinery in immaculate condition being ridden as their inventors intended, rather than just parked in a museum or

30
dosso
artificiale

The hills near Pesaro come to life with a cacophony of biking history

> 'Immaculate vintage bikes being ridden rather than just parked in a museum or garage'

Ah... must be time for another rest in another charming town

eccetto
autorizzati

Tehuelche – a 1950s Argentine bike designed by two Italians

Author Jeff competes on a modern Benelli

Paying a visit to the Italian Air Force Museum

28
Vespa-Club
BOLOGNA

Motogiro celebrates all of Italy's biking heritage

Left: locals welcome the rally with real pageantry

Right: a brief shower doesn't dampen spirits

garage. The motorcycles taking part are from a different era, decades old, but still belting out their imperious war cries on roads that feel like they were created specifically for riding.

Each morning riders clad in well-worn leathers roll their beloved bikes to the starting gate and line up according to their number. The air is then filled with the sound of old engines coming to life. There are more kick starters here than you're likely to encounter anywhere else. Some bikes start first try, others are slightly more temperamental. There is simple gratification in hearing a cold vintage engine cough into life after several kicks. And as you might imagine, there's a lot of bump-starting. The clock ticks down and riders are flagged off for another day of adventure amid a chorus of clapping valves, slapping pistons and belting exhaust notes.

The Motogiro is a timed rally with points tallied to determine individual stage winners and an overall victor. Speed is not the goal but rather punctuality, with points demerited for late arrival to any of the five or six checkpoints each day. Additional points are earned (or lost) in a series of special tests, which usually comprise of a short course of cones, and a subsequent straight section that must be traversed in as close to the same time as possible. It's tougher than it sounds. The serious competitors have mounted stopwatches to accurately gauge these transitions. The Motogiro is a competition, but there tends to be more smiles and laughs than angst or arguments.

Averaging just over 150 miles (250km) per day, the stages are made up of winding roads through beautiful landscapes and quaint villages. The first stage of 2025 begins in Pesaro, with a loop through Rimini, San Leo and Tavullia, before winding back to Pesaro. Over the next few days the circus moves on to Terni, Amelia and Bracciano, before returning to the seaside at San Benedetto del Tronto. The fifth day, backdropped by the Adriatic Sea from up high in the mountains, traverses charming villages such as Loreto, Montegiorgio and Pedaso. The final day returns to the start point in Pesaro via a stop at the Benelli Museum.

Through it all are the gracious and appreciative waves and applause of locals who warmly welcome

Motogiro: from race to rally

» The Motogiro d'Italia was Italy's most prestigious and famous road race. First run in 1914, it was born out of the crazed love affair the public was enjoying with the nascent motorised excitement of automobiles and motorcycles. These road races were genuine spectacles, routing through remote villages and winding mountain roads, allowing locals the opportunity to cheer on the riders and drivers as they raced through the normally peaceful enclaves. However, as vehicles evolved over the years, so did the speeds. The danger became obvious. Crashes and injuries, as well as fatalities, began to accrue, resulting in public outcry.

The concerns of the public, and the government's efforts to curb the events, were given sobering evidence in 1957. A horrific crash at the Mille Miglia car race resulted in the deaths of a driver and navigator, as well as nine spectators. In response, the government shut down all races on public roads. It was the end of an era.

A decade later, in 1967, the Motogiro – now classified as a timed road rally as opposed to a race – enjoyed a one-off rebirth. It was granted permission again in 1968, and in 1969.

Franco Farné leads on a Ducati at the last Motogiro race in 1957

DUCATI

Twenty years would elapse before it was relaunched – in 1989 the event attracted enough participants to prove its enduring popularity. After another hiatus the Motogiro returned in 2001 and has since enjoyed regular annual running, giving aficionados of vintage motorcycles an opportunity to relive the glory of these motorcycles' storied pasts.

Left: 1000 miles, no gloves, no socks, big grin

Right: vintage Motobi leading the way

riders into their towns and villages. Checkpoints and water stops are traditionally chosen for their heritage and historical significance: a castle; an ancient town square; a tree-covered park. Sometimes there's a hero's welcome of schoolchildren lining the avenue, cheering wildly. Several times we're greeted by a full regalia of drummers and trumpeters in period costume, performing a traditional folk song with flag bearers waving the town's colours. The Motogiro is an environment of celebration and culture.

The circus moves to different hotels every second day. Each morning Carabinieri leap-frog ahead to block traffic for the 200 vintage motorcycles easing out of town. The noise is wonderful. Each day is its own unique adventure. Some ride in groups or with friends, others choose to go solo. Between the checkpoints, the food stops (plenty of pizza and pasta) and the special tests, there is a lot of glorious riding. Despite 200 motorcycles and various support vehicles, things spread out and there are plenty of solitary moments to be enjoyed, when the road opens up ahead and behind with not another soul in sight. Throughout the day there are overtakes, or being overtaken, accompanied by the various sounds of singles, twins, triples and fours and the occasional crackle of a two-stroke, leaving the sweet scent of burnt premix wafting in the air.

The Italian hills are an appropriate backdrop for this escape into the past. The pace is surprisingly swift. Traditionally scheduled for May, the weather offers the best possible riding, with mild temperatures and relatively little precipitation. The planners of the Motogiro do an impeccable job of searching out interesting places with motorcycle-friendly roads.

The route is carefully marked to keep riders heading in the right direction. Naturally, people miss markers and get lost, but that's just part of the event. A sweep team locate the lost, pick up those who have broken down – after all, these are vintage bikes – and deliver everyone to that night's hotel.

Evenings turn into indulgent affairs of great food and plenty of libation, where the nightly presentations for each day's stage winners often get loud and rowdy. This culminates on the sixth day with the final overall standings and awarding of trophies. The top scorers stand atop a podium.

But of all the myriad joys to be found at the Motogiro – the riding, the villages, the people, the bikes, the food – there's one aspect that really moves me. When we stop in each town, locals peruse the machines. There always seems to be a grey-haired senior citizen, often walking with the aid of a cane, who would find one bike to contemplate with a gleam in their eye. I couldn't help but imagine they're unearthing old memories and reliving their youth.

What is it that drives us to embrace and lust after these old machines – the fascination in old engines still turning and the charm of their dated performance? It all serves some respectful alliance to motorcycling's glorious past. Yes, obviously, a return to a simpler time, but also one that celebrates the magic of motorcycling's past inventions. For behind each brand and model, were entrepreneurs, designers and engineers, long departed, who conjured these marvellous machines from pure passion.

SPECIFICATIONS	BENELLI TRK702X
Price	£6999
Engine	698cc 8v liquid-cooled DOHC parallel twin
Bore x stroke	83 x 64.5mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain
Power	69bhp @ 8000rpm
Torque	52lb·ft @ 6000rpm
Weight	218kg (claimed, dry)
Seat height	835mm
Fuel capacity	20 litres
Fuel consumption	48mpg (average, tested)

***Bike* verdict** Intended as an easy-to-ride road-focused adventure bike, Benelli's TRK702X is designed in the firm's original Pesaro headquarters, though it's manufactured in China under partnership with Qianjiang Motorcycle (aka QJMotor). After spending six days and 1000 miles with the TRK, it's a pleasant surprise. Everything from throttle response to transmission to turn-in feels solid, smooth and predictable. Not just an ideal mount for newer riders, the TRK has room to grow into with enough performance to keep an experienced rider entertained. Plus at just £6999, it costs a quarter of some other adventurers.

TRK702X: a long way off vintage, just as enjoyable on the Motogiro

DAINESE
TRK

‘The fifth day, backdropped by the Adriatic Sea from up high in the mountains, traverses charming villages’

Ride the Motogiro

The 2026 Motogiro d’Italia heads to Sardinia from 24-30 May. If you want to be transported back in time for a week of glorious food, zany characters and a shared love of classic machinery, you should seriously consider making it happen. The Motogiro is open to anyone with a motorcycle licence. There is almost certainly a class to accommodate your bike – all years, engine configurations and displacements are covered. Rentals are also available. Visit motogiroitalia.it to secure your place.

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Advice, guidance and things to do with bikes

KNOW HOW

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DR. WACK
S100
WATERLESS CLEANER
FR NETTOYANT EXPRESS SANS EAU
IT PULITORE RAPIDO PER MOTO
ES LIMPIADOR RÁPIDO PARA MOTO

Thing of the month

S100 Waterless Cleaner £14.99

Bit of an indulgence, but a decent waterless wash is worth having on your shelves. Too expensive for a full nose-to-tail clean, it doesn't replace a bucket, sponge or Kärcher but sits alongside them. It's ideal for clearing patches of greb without the hassle of getting all the kit out. Spray, wipe with a microfibre, done. This S100 stuff is incredible, cutting through road film, clearing flies and even dissolving chain lube, then leaving a pleasing shine. Plus it doesn't feel greasy or creamy, unlike some rivals. ***MFG***

thekeycollection.co.uk

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE

Ed Armitage
Young person

Does Honda's GB350S still appeal after three months?

Karl de Vroomen
MT-09 enthusiast

Wanted a bike that would inspire him to ride. Found it in the MT.

Martin Fitz-Gibbons
Fashion victim

Bike's editor might not understand 'trendy', but he knows good kit.

Ben Miller
Mountain climber

Needed to get to Italy. Budget airline, or GS via the Swiss Alps?

Kyle Ryde
BSB champion

Never ridden an RC30. Never ridden at Spa. Left jaws hanging.

Mark Graham
Oddities officer

Ponders the forgotten sports-touring boxer: BMW's R1100RS.

A summer of cheerful tootling, but time to move on

[The Verdict]

‘Great to ride, but I’ve outgrown it’

Keenly priced and a strong seller, we’re impressed by the **Honda GB350S**. But after three months, A2 rider Ed Armitage is left wanting a tad more

Photography **Adam Shorrock, Jamie Morris, Mike Armitage**

Having done my A2 licence on a Honda CB500 Hornet then spent a few months with one, I expected to be a little underwhelmed by the GB350S. I loved the style, finish and full-size proportions – and the £3999 price tag – but thought 21bhp might feel flat. But I immediately fell for it.

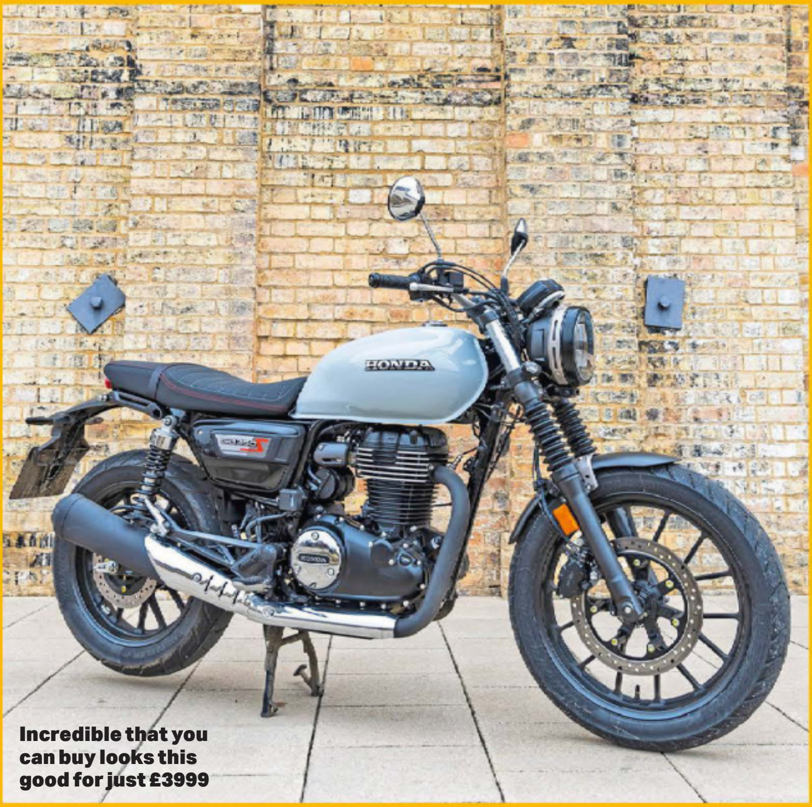
Coming from the Hornet, the GB350S felt so much more comfortable. The ride quality felt superior, and it came into its own when arcing through corners and rolling down tight lanes. ‘Bend swinging’, as my dad calls it. The low centre of gravity gave confidence and stability regardless of speed, and the 348cc single-cylinder motor ticked along beautifully – there’s a sense of torque even just tickling the throttle, a deep bom-bom-bom chasing me down country roads, and an old-bike feel from the widely spaced five-speed gearbox. It’s slower than the 500, but I didn’t mind. Smooth, tractable, breezy, it felt ‘right’. My dad came back from his first ride on it and declared it was ‘just lovely’.

It also rarely needed to visit a forecourt, was fabulously easy to live with (duff mirrors, but great headlight, reassuring marker lights, pleasingly simple dash and proper bungee points), and made me loads of new friends. The modest 350 seemed to be the star attraction among the bigger, flashier bikes at our local meets – everyone seemed impressed and wanted to know more.

And here comes the ‘but’. I’ve been cheerfully pootling around at 55-60mph, taking the scenic route and enjoying the ride. But I increasingly feel like I’m missing out on the thrill of the ride. It’s not about wheelies and knee-down (which is fine, because I can’t do either); it’s about being able to overtake safely when I fancy, without miles of planning, and being able to get up motorway hills without changing down a gear. Fifth is effectively an overdrive, so I find myself just hanging onto fourth. An awful lot of time is spent close to full throttle.

For the GB350S to be designed, developed, built in Japan, shipped halfway across the world and sold at a profit for £3999 with a six-year warranty is remarkable. So too is the way Honda have built a smaller-capacity, lower-powered bike with the presence and air of a larger machine – there’s no sense of it being a ‘starter bike’ or cheaply made.

But while I still love its simplicity and authentic charm, I think I’ve outgrown it. For all the enthusiastic middle-aged men who have stopped and nattered to me about wanting one alongside their more powerful bike, or who just want simple weekend wheels, the Honda is perfect. But I’m only 20 years old. I still think the GB350S is a gorgeous bike, but I find myself wanting a bit more acceleration, fizz and fun. **EA**



Incredible that you can buy looks this good for just £3999

FACTS AND FIGURES

Wet weight

178kg

Top speed

85mph

Fuel figures

75

MPG Average

Tank size:
15 litres
Distance to fuel light:
190 miles
Range:
247 miles

Price £3999 **Engine** 348cc SOHC 2v single
Power 21bhp @ 5500rpm (claimed)
Torque 21lb·ft @ 3000rpm (claimed)
Rake/trail 27°/120mm **Wheelbase** 1440mm
Seat height 800mm **Colours** Pearl Deep Mud Grey, Gunmetal Black Metallic, Puco Blue
Availability now

MY FAVOURITE BITS

» SIDESTAND
It's a small detail, but the lug is perfectly placed. It's so nice not having to fish around; just put your foot back and there it is.

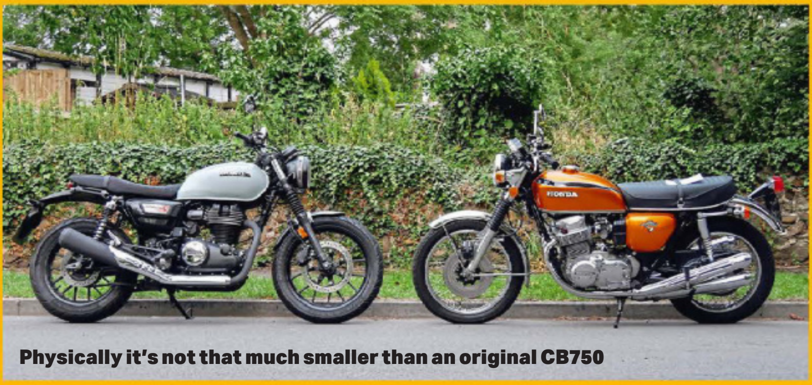
» ENGINE
Sure, it's like travelling on a second-class stamp. But the character and sound of the single are spot on. It's just missing the whiff of burnt oil.

» LOOKS
Nailed it. It's the best-looking A2 retro by a mile, and 'Puco Blue' is utterly ace. It's the perfect mix of modern and retro.

Equally admired by the young and the less-young

Spent much of its year pointing at 55mph

Proper bungee points are a blessing

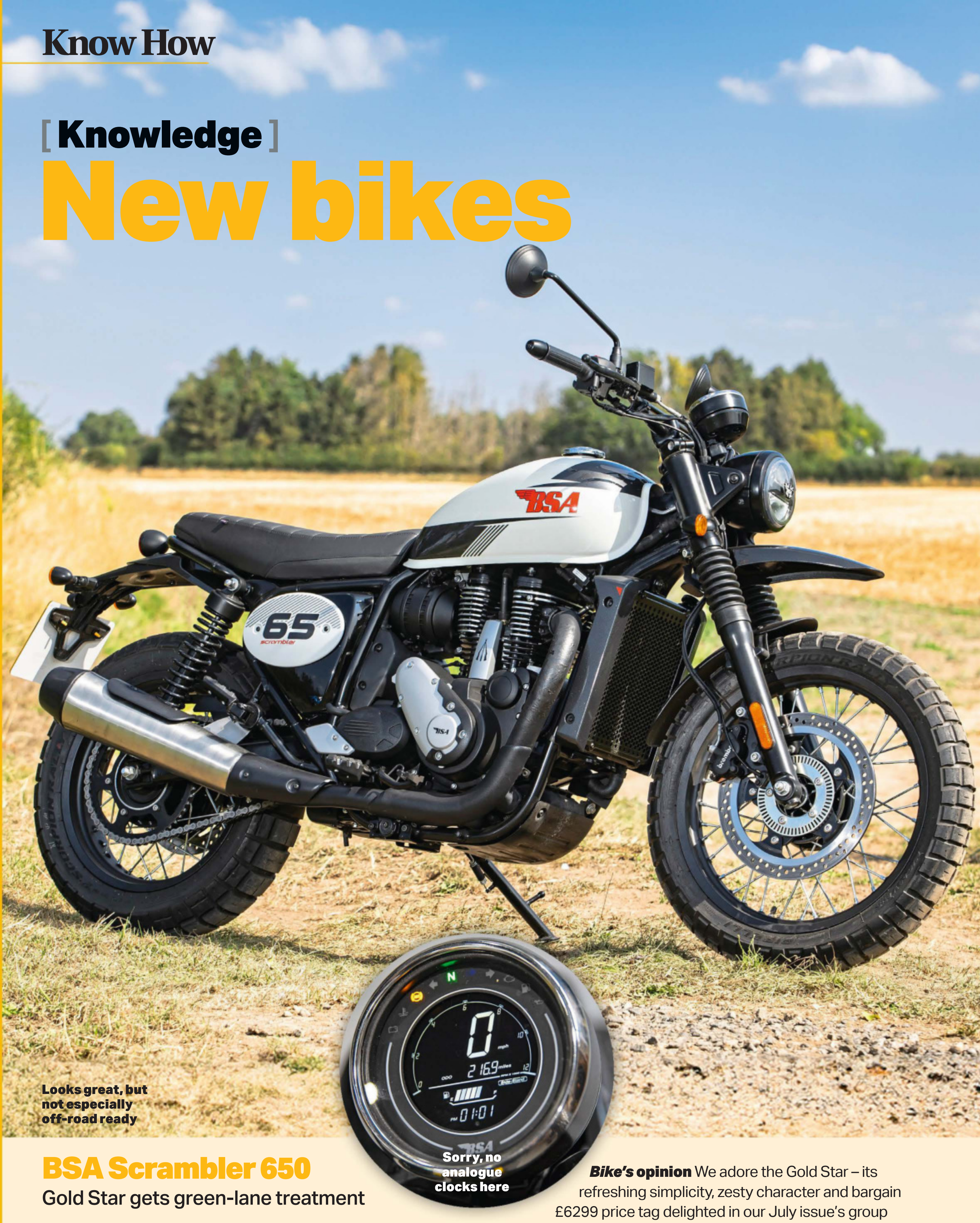


Physically it's not that much smaller than an original CB750

THE VERDICT

» The GB350S is a cracking little bike. I say little in the metaphorical sense – it's a lot of bike for £3999. Add that it's built in Japan and has a six-year warranty, it's obvious why you'd want one. With enough money and garage space I'd have one for short summer scurries without a second thought. But I'd want something else as well. Something with a bit more oomph and thrill. The GB is ace, and I see why it sells so well. But I want a few more horses after all.

[Knowledge]
New bikes



Looks great, but not especially off-road ready

Sorry, no analogue clocks here

BSA Scrambler 650

Gold Star gets green-lane treatment

What's new? Fundamentals from the Gold Star remain – the five-speed, 652cc water-cooled single still chuffs out its 45bhp – but this new Scrambler version rides high on longer-travel suspension, a 19in front wheel and Pirelli Scorpion Rally STR tyres. Seat height climbs 40mm (to 820mm), wheelbase is stretched and kerb weight is up 5kg to 218kg. Visually it's toughened up too, with blacked-out parts replacing chrome, plus a new seat, numberboards and mudguards.

***Bike's* opinion** We adore the Gold Star – its refreshing simplicity, zesty character and bargain £6299 price tag delighted in our July issue's group test. The Scrambler version looks fantastic and is just about different enough to stand on its own two knobbly tyres as a separate model. But dynamically it's not quite as cohesive as the Goldie. The longer suspension isn't brilliantly damped, while the new riding triangle feels slightly off with its braced handlebars set too far away. Still, it's even more affordable than the Gold Star, with pricing set at £5999 plus on-the-road charges – we work that out to be a true £6175.

Looks great, and pleasingly off-road ready

KTM 390 Enduro R

Trail-capable, keenly priced and leading KTM's comeback

What's new? Forget the slightly underwhelming, road-focused old 390 Adventure. This new Enduro R gets long-travel (230mm) WP suspension, large-diameter knobbly-shod wheels (21in front, 18in rear) and a pepped-up 399cc single, boasting 44bhp, taken from the latest Duke.

***Bike's* opinion** Ignore the name – it's not an enduro, it's a dual-purpose trailie that strikes a neat balance between road and off-road. And all for just £5699, massively undercutting Suzuki's £7999 DR-Z4S. This makes us even more excited for the new 390 Adventure R's imminent arrival…

Too off-road ready, but looks great

Aprilia Tuareg Rally 660

Middleweight adventurer goes a bit too hardcore

What's new? Uprated suspension with linear springs, sturdy spoked wheels, a snappier engine response, SC-Project exhaust, heavy-duty sump protector and beaky mudguard. Tweaked riding position with higher bars and seat, plus it's 5kg lighter than the regular Tuareg.

***Bike's* opinion** This Rally version looks phenomenal with its red frame, gold rims and sharp black-and-purple paint scheme. But to ride it's firm, focused and fiery, a bit too eager on the throttle, and its long-travel suspension isn't as plush as we'd like. It's also £12,400 – that's £1000 more than a Yamaha Ténéré 700 Rally.

EAST
BUCCLEUCH
FARM
Turquoise wheels over cruise control? A wise choice

[Why I love my…]

Yamaha MT-09

From touring to trackdays, **Karl de Vroomen** has done it all

Anyone who's tried Yamaha's CP3 triple will tell you the engine is fantastic. In the MT-09 it takes centre stage – it's raw, incredibly direct and so much fun. It makes a wonderful racket when you're on the gas too, egging you on.

I had a Yamaha FJR1300 before this, bought for doing cross-country schleps for work. I'd only had it a month when Covid hit and suddenly working from home became the norm. Increasingly the FJR just sat in the garage; a tool shorn of its purpose.

I wanted a bike that would inspire me to ride just for the sake of it. Five minutes into a test ride on the MT-09, I knew I'd found it.

> 'I wanted a bike that would inspire me to ride'

I think my 2022 model hits the MT-09 sweet spot. Yamaha had really sorted the handling over the original, plus mine has the bigger 890cc engine, as well as the six-axis IMU from the R1 – but before the pointless redesign of indicator switches. I would have liked cruise control from the SP, but this one had turquoise wheels! The saving I made buying the base model was spent on a suspension upgrade from MCT.

Nothing has gone wrong in the 11,000 miles since I bought it new. If you fit a tail tidy your back gets coated with road spray, so instead I have a rear wheel spray guard. What don't I like? The front end is a bit of a mess, visually. If it had a round headlight and an 18-litre-plus tank, it would be perfect.

I'm 6ft 3in and have been surprised by its versatility. I have a big Givi top box, heated grips, handguards and an MRA screen. With that set-up, plus a ComfortAir seat cushion, I can do 300-mile days. I've done a couple of tours round Scotland from my home in Norwich. I use it to commute to the office, but take the top box off and it's a very capable track bike.

Naked bikes are sometimes portrayed as sunny Sunday toys, but if you get one that fits you physically, they can be all the bike you need.

Buying tips

» What to look for Yamaha have issued various MT-09 recalls ranging from ABS units and gear shift shafts on early bikes, to TPS sensors on more recent models.

» What to pay Prices start at £3500 for first-gen MT-09s, or £6300 for a 2021-on 890cc bike.

» Insurance For a great deal on used bike insurance go to mcncompare.com

MCN COMPARE

Listings

This isn't a limp brochure-style round-up of all the bikes you can buy. No, your guide is far more useful as it **only contains bikes that we have tested**, with comparable on-the-road prices plus data, expert opinion and must-know detail gathered by fussy full-time testers. We do hundreds of thousands of miles, dyno, datalog, weigh and answer the big questions. Don't buy a new bike without reading this first.

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
APRILIA uk.aprilia.com, 00800 15565500 *Bike's* choice: Tuono Factory defines the supernaked class… but we'd buy an RS660								
RSV4 Factory 1100	**£23,850**	**1099cc V4**	**186mph***	**217bhp****	**45mpg**	Ace engine, great suspension and electronics, exemplary steering. Also tiny, and depreciates.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
Tuono V4 Factory	**£18,950**	**1099cc V4**	**165mph**	**178bhp**	**35mpg**	Superb motor, crisp chassis, exotic-yet-friendly. Cool. Non-Factory model is everyday usable.	**10/10**	**Aug '25**
Tuareg 660	**£10,900**	**659cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**59mpg****	Ténéré rival is less rounded but has more tech and better suspension. Rugged, fun, but a bit raw.	**8/10**	**Oct '22**
RS660	**£10,450**	**659cc twin**	**139mph**	**91bhp**	**45mpg**	Sportsbike handling, punch and tech; sports-tourer comfort and usability. Impressive thing.	**10/10**	**Dec '24**
Tuono 660	**£9,850**	**659cc twin**	**135mph***	**90bhp***	**50mpg**	Comfier and more agile than RS660, more fun than a Street Triple. Fancier Factory version £10k.	**9/10**	**Jun '21**
BENELLI benelli.com, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: Leoncino 800 Trail is the only Benelli we've ridden recently, so Leoncino 800 Trail it is								
Leoncino 800 Trail	**£6,599**	**754cc twin**	**115mph***	**80bhp****	**40mpg**	Promising on paper, with a potent motor and bargain price. But heavy and anonymous to ride.	**6/10**	**Jan '24**
BIMOTA bimotauk.co.uk, 01603 920240 *Bike's* choice: radical, extreme, wacky, beautiful… who wouldn't want a Tesi?								
Tesi H2	**£59,000**	**998cc V4**	**190mph***	**237bhp****	**28mpg**	Epic supercharged motor in delicious hub-steered chassis. Exquisite, wild, thirsty, expensive.	**8/10**	**Sep '21**
Tesi H2 Tera	**£34,468**	**998cc inline 4**	**170mph***	**197bhp****	**40mpg***	Supercharger meets funny front end meets knobbly tyres. Logical? No. Brilliant? Oh yes…	**8/10**	**Oct '25**
BMW bmw-motorrad.co.uk, 0800 777155 *Bike's* choice: yeah, it's predictable… but brilliance of the GS can't be ignored								
R18 Classic	**£19,540**	**1802cc flat twin**	**115mph***	**91bhp****	**51mpg**	Ace boxer cruiser spoilt a tad by its slightly Harley-ish screen and bags, but still a tidy device.	**8/10**	**May '21**
R18	**£17,480**	**1802cc flat twin**	**113mph**	**87bhp**	**50mpg**	Top mix of modernity, quality and tradition. Roctane model (£22k) has less bling, more handling.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
K1600GT	**£21,640**	**1649cc inline 6**	**154mph****	**158bhp****	**48mpg****	Magical motor, amazing agility, self-levelling suspension, all the toys… It's a sporty-super-tourer.	**9/10**	**Jul '22**
R1300GS Adventure TE	**£20,780**	**1300cc flat twin**	**135mph***	**143bhp****	**43mpg**	It may look vast, but the latest GSA is far more agile than the ol' 1250. Astonishing roadholding.	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
R1300GS TE	**£19,190**	**1300cc flat twin**	**135mph****	**138bhp**	**49mpg**	Less weight, more oomph, fancy toys – it's the best big GS yet. But the Ducati Multi' V4 is slicker…	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
R1300RS SE	**£15,999**	**1300cc flat twin**	**140mph***	**143bhp****	**43mpg**	More aggressive and dynamic than the previous R1250RS. More sports and less touring.	**8/10**	**Sep '25**
R12 nineT	**£14,420**	**1170cc flat twin**	**140mph***	**108bhp****	**55mpg****	High-quality retro with thumping twin, solid handling, top details, and more tech than ever. Ace.	**9/10**	**May '24**
R12 G/S	**£14,420**	**1170cc flat twin**	**140mph***	**107bhp****	**55mpg****	Half retro and half adventurer. Long-travel suspension and 21in front make it green-lane ready.	**8/10**	**Oct '25**
M1000RR	**£36,040**	**999cc inline 4**	**195mph***	**209bhp***	**36mpg***	Wild homologation exotica with stupid power and wings – yet you can ride it to work. Mind-blowing.	**9/10**	**Dec '23**
M1000XR	**£22,580**	**999cc inline 4**	**173mph**	**190bhp**	**42mpg**	Adventure meets WSB. Epic… but a bit vibey and no luggage options. Not sure why you'd want it.	**7/10**	**Oct '24**
S1000RR Sport	**£18,610**	**999cc inline 4**	**190mph***	**207bhp****	**44mpg****	Amazing mix of insane performance and usability, but latest one not quite as friendly as it used to be.	**9/10**	**Feb '25**
S1000XR TE	**£18,340**	**999cc inline 4**	**155mph**	**161bhp**	**43mpg**	High-rise sportsbike. Fast, agile, well equipped. Also got an odd seat. Very good, but not perfect.	**8/10**	**May '25**
S1000R Sport	**£15,315**	**999cc inline 4**	**167mph**	**163bhp**	**48mpg**	Not shouty, but epic: agility, ride, engine and spec are superb. M1000R (£19,480) not worth extra.	**10/10**	**Aug '22**
F900GS	**£11,995**	**895cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**60mpg****	Better on road and trail than previous 850. Not full of character, but the best GS for greenlaning.	**8/10**	**May '24**
F900XR	**£10,890**	**895cc twin**	**125mph***	**103bhp**	**57mpg**	Easy-to-use Tracer rival with eager twin, fit chassis. Better value than ever, but the Yam is better.	**7/10**	**Aug '25**
F750GS	**£8,995**	**853cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp**	**69mpg****	Slim front tyre and 19in wheel make this detuned 850 a better road bike. But lacks some 'wow'.	**7/10**	**May '18**
BSA bsacompany.co.uk *Bike's* choice: the Gold Star has proven itself to be compelling, charismatic and phenomenal value								
Gold Star	**£5,171**	**652cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp**	**58mpg**	A2-legal retro with '50s style, decent quality and iconic badge. For laid-back Sunday pootles.	**8/10**	**Jul '25**
Bantam 350	**£3,499**	**334cc single**	**85mph***	**29bhp****	**70mpg***	Simple, charming, approachable retro with surprisingly peppy motor and bargain price tag.	**8/10**	**Oct '25**
CFMOTO cfmoto.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Chinese bikes come of age – 450MT is a seriously good A2 adventurist								
800NK Sport	**£6,171**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**94bhp****	**45mpg***	Basically it's KTM 790 Duke with a few different parts and fresh looks. It's good and it's cheap.	**8/10**	**Nov '23**
700CL-X Heritage	**£5,171**	**693cc twin**	**117mph**	**64bhp****	**55mpg**	Chirpy, fun, usable, good spec, long warranty. It's good… but no longer cheap next to finer rivals.	**7/10**	**Mar '23**
450MT	**£5,699**	**449cc twin**	**112mph***	**46bhp****	**65mpg***	As good as a Ténéré on trails, extremely robust, good spec, keen price. Why buy anything else?	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
450SR S	**£5,699**	**449cc twin**	**115mph***	**46bhp****	**65mpg**	Eager yet smooth motor, agile handling, single-sider, TFT… it's as sporty as A2 gets. Impressive.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
DUCATI ducatiuk.com, 0845 718500 *Bike's* choice: effective, fun and funky, the DesertX is so damn desirable								
XDiavel V4	**£26,171**	**1158cc V4**	**150mph***	**166bhp****	**43mpg***	Low-slung, feet-forward stance meets MotoGP-derived V4. Stunning, yes, but not a cruiser.	**7/10**	**Sep '25**
Diavel V4	**£24,171**	**1158cc V4**	**150mph***	**166bhp****	**44mpg****	Caricature looks, raked stance, wild power, silly tail lights. And amazing. Not for everyone, mind.	**8/10**	**Apr '23**
Multistrada V4 Rally	**£24,371**	**1158cc V4**	**155mph***	**170bhp****	**43mpg****	Most sophisticated, rounded, clever Ducati ever. Staggeringly complete. Pricey, yes. Also epic.	**10/10**	**Mar '25**
Multistrada V4 S	**£21,671**	**1158cc V4**	**155mph***	**155bhp**	**38mpg**	As an overall package it's even slicker than an R1300GS. Polished and sophisticated, if thirsty.	**9/10**	**Mar '24**
Panigale V4 S	**£30,171**	**1103cc V4**	**191mph**	**203bhp**	**39mpg**	Stupid-fast, sharp, needs working to get the best out, but still feels mega to 'normal' folk. Wow.	**9/10**	**Apr '25**
Streetfighter V4 S	**£25,171**	**1103cc V4**	**169mph**	**181bhp**	**34mpg**	Fast, sexy, loud, desirable… but constantly a full-on experience. SP2 version (£32k) even sillier.	**8/10**	**Jul '24**
Scrambler 1100	**£14,671**	**1079cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**83bhp****	**45mpg***	1100 Evo-engined, easy-riding Scrambler has charming twin and more comfort than 800s.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
DesertX	**£15,371**	**937cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**110bhp****	**41mpg**	Sexy dual-purpose tool perfectly balances road and off-road needs. Our 2022 Bike of the Year.	**10/10**	**Oct '22**
Monster	**£11,771**	**937cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**110bhp****	**45mpg***	Light, fun, usable, quality roadster with badge appeal. Mega. SP (£14k) sharper but less usable.	**10/10**	**Feb '22**
Panigale V2 S	**£17,171**	**890cc V-twin**	**160mph***	**118bhp****	**53mpg****	Lighter, friendlier and less 'grr' than any previous Ducati sportsbike, but still slick and fast. Ace.	**8/10**	**Oct '25**
Multistrada V2 S	**£16,566**	**890cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**114bhp****	**47mpg**	Refined like no Ducati twin before. Also comfy, swift, high-tech and top quality. Pricey but mega.	**9/10**	**Apr '25**
Streetfighter V2 S	**£16,166**	**890cc V-twin**	**160mph***	**118bhp****	**53mpg****	Less power, speed and edge than before – and better for it. Still a Ducati, but the friendliest yet.	**8/10**	**Nov '25**
Scrambler Full Throttle	**£11,371**	**803cc V-twin**	**125mph***	**72bhp****	**47mpg**	Image and quality matched by much-improved dynamic. Easy in town, great on back roads.	**8/10**	**Jan '24**
Hypermotard 698 Mono	**£11,471**	**659cc single**	**125mph***	**76bhp****	**59mpg**	Fruitiest single ever is light, responsive, engaging. But it craves twisty roads and a skilled rider.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
FANTIC fanticmotoruk.com *Bike's* choice: there are three versions of the Cabellero, but just go for the best colour (so that's the Scrambler)								
Caballero 700	**£9,699**	**689cc twin**	**115mph***	**74bhp****	**46mpg***	Retro scrambler built around Yam's great MT-07 motor. Good, has its moments… but not ace.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**
Caballero 500 Rally	**£7,199**	**463cc single**	**100mph***	**44bhp****	**67mpg****	New Italy-built engine is charming, but vibrates when pushed hard. Handles well for a 21in front.	**8/10**	**Sep '25**

VEHICLE PO
SOLID STATE BATTERY

Not-so-solid future

» Solid-state batteries have long been promised as a holy grail for EVs. Swap today's liquid electrolyte for a solid separator material (say, ceramic), then replace the graphite anode with a lithium metal one. Bingo: better energy density, safety and charging. Car firms have been talking up solid-state batteries since 2010, but they always seem to be a few years away. Recently Ducati (via parent VW) showed a prototype MotoE race bike with a solid-state battery. Three days later FIM and Dorna killed the MotoE championship.

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** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
HARLEY-DAVIDSON harley-davidson.com, 0871 6412508 *Bike's* choice: the CVO Street Glide is insane money, but the best touring H-D we've ridden								
CVO Street Glide	£40,495	1977cc V-twin	120mph*	120bhp*	50mpg	Best ever H-D tourer. Refined, classy, with huge grunt and nimbleness. Unique experience.	9/10	Jan '24
CVO Road Glide	£40,495	1977cc V-twin	105mph*	105bhp**	43mpg**	The defining H-D full-dress tourer with extra bling. Luxurious, surprising, expensive… unique.	8/10	Sep '23
Low Rider ST	£21,295	1923cc V-twin	115mph*	114bhp**	51mpg**	H-D's sports-tourer gains 9bhp and drops 23kg for 2025. Odd riding position, but enjoyable.	8/10	Nov '25
Low Rider S	£19,795	1923cc V-twin	115mph	114bhp**	51mpg**	Top looks and noise, more fun to ride than you think. But better in California than Croydon.	6/10	Jan '20
Pan America Special	£17,295	1252cc V-twin	135mph**	148bhp**	43mpg	Comfy, composed, brisk, lots of equipment. Very good, but not quite a GS or Multistrada rival.	8/10	Sep '21
Sportster S	£15,145	1252cc V-twin	120mph*	119bhp**	50mpg	Fastest, smoothest, best handling, most techy Harley cruiser ever. Ace… but lacks the H-D feel.	8/10	Nov '21
Nightster Special	£14,495	975cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp**	52mpg**	Smallest engine in H-D's range. Decent looks, modern ride, but lacks Harley soul. A bit… odd.	6/10	Aug '22
HONDA honda.co.uk/motorcycles, 0845 2008000 *Bike's* choice: Hornet's good, Blade's epic… but have you ridden an NT1100? Great tool								
GL1800 Gold Wing Tour	£33,499	1833cc flat-six	112mph	125bhp**	51mpg	Huge, OTT, but smart suspension, toys and utter refinement mean it's still the grand-tour king.	8/10	Dec '22
Africa Twin Adv' Sport	£16,499	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	44mpg	All the tech, plush optional semi-active, classy feel, huge range. And daft switchgear. Hey-ho.	9/10	Nov '24
NT1100 DCT ES	£14,299	1084cc twin	123mph	97bhp	52mpg	Cross between Africa Twin and Deauville. Not exciting, but high-spec, plush, quietly ace tourer.	9/10	May '25
Africa Twin	£13,399	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	47mpg	Feels like a big, refined enduro bike, so is different to a GS. Cheaper too. Daft switches and dash.	8/10	Jul '24
CMX1100 Rebel	£9,999	1084cc twin	125mph*	86bhp**	52mpg	Africa Twin motor in cheery, usable, well-made cruiser. Not plush, but fun and very affordable.	8/10	Jan '22
CBR1000RR-R Blade SP	£23,699	1000cc inline 4	185mph*	215bhp**	42mpg**	Revvy, focused, full of HRC-ness. But also refined, classy, and more usable than you think.	9/10	Feb '25
CB1000 Hornet SP	£10,099	1000cc inline 4	150mph*	155bhp	48mpg**	Powerful, fine spec, great ride. Not like a 'cheap' S1000R – think more ace-for-£10k naked.	9/10	Nov '25
XL750 Transalp	£9,899	755cc twin	135mph*	91bhp*	58mpg	Smooth, easy to ride, great ergonomics, and cool colours. But revvy twin doesn't suit the bike.	8/10	Aug '23
CB750 Hornet	£7,449	755cc twin	140mph*	91bhp**	65mpg**	Simple, honest, fun, great spec, class-leading power – and affordable too. But GSX-8S is nicer…	9/10	Jul '23
X-ADV	£11,499	745cc twin	105mph*	54bhp**	70mpg*	Off-road scooter you'll never take off-road. Pricey too. But also practical, enjoyable and top fun.	8/10	Mar '25
Forza 750	£10,699	745cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	70mpg	Capable bike with looks and practicality of a scooter. And DCT. Odd concept, ace execution.	9/10	May '21
NC750X	£7,599	745cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	70mpg	Flexible twin, big mpg, agile, clever storage. Not flash, but very useful. DCT (£800) is worth it.	10/10	Nov '21
CBR650R E-Clutch	£8,799	649cc inline 4	138mph	86bhp	54mpg	Flexible, handsome, fun, fast-enough road sportsbike. Smart auto clutch is genuinely useful.	8/10	Aug '24
CB650R	£7,829	649cc inline 4	140mph	93bhp**	50mpg	Naked version of CBR (above) is fabulously balanced. Quality, dynamic and value all superb.	9/10	May '19
CBR600RR	£10,999	599cc inline 4	165mph*	119bhp**	52mpg**	Shrieking power, epic agility, pinpoint steering, top quality. Tiny and demanding, yes. But mega.	8/10	Oct '25
GB350S	£3,999	348cc single	85mph*	21bhp**	70mpg**	Charming retro with old-school quality. A lot slower than a Speed 400, but plush, classy, cheap.	8/10	Jun '25
CRF300L	£5,899	286cc single	80mph*	27bhp**	70mpg*	Fit green-laner, easy commuter, bit quicker than old 250. Rally (£6599) has big tank and screen.	7/10	Aug '22
Super Cub	£3,999	125cc single	65mph*	9.2bhp	124mpg	Descendent of iconic step-thru' is charming. Ownership by urban folk should be compulsory.	8/10	Jul '19
HUSQVARNA husqvarnamotorcycles.com/gb *Bike's* choice: Supermoto is desirable, funky, silly… and yet usable day-to-day								
Norden 901	£12,899	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	Attractive reworking of KTM 890 Adventure. Capable, nicely made, but lacks a 'wow' moment.	7/10	Oct '22
Svartpilen 801	£9,999	799cc twin	130mph*	104bhp**	50mpg*	KTM 790 Duke motor in a classier, calmer chassis. Not cheap, but refined, good spec, nice feel.	8/10	Oct '24
701 Supermoto	£10,399	693cc single	121mph	71bhp	54mpg	Engaging, fun at sensible speed, frugal, sexy, friendlier than it looks. Proper middleweight tool.	9/10	Sep '17
701 Enduro	£10,399	693cc single	120mph*	71bhp	54mpg	Proper dirt bike, yet refined, frugal and plush on the road. If only the seat wasn't a plank…	9/10	Nov '23
Svartpilen 401	£5,599	375cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	65mpg*	Built for A2 riders avoiding the mainstream. Essentially KTM's fine 390 Duke with more style.	7/10	Jul '18
INDIAN indianmotorcycle.co.uk *Bike's* choice: classic character, modern quality, unique feel – Scout is a standout cruiser								
Chief Dark Horse	£17,495	1890cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp*	60mpg	Big twin has stripped-back cool, walloping drive, surprising agility. Engaging trad' cruiser.	8/10	Feb '24
Chieftain PowerPlus Ltd	£27,595	1834cc V-twin	125mph*	127bhp**	40mpg*	Huge bagger with hugely grunty (134lb·ft) and refined motor, full bling and tech. Even handles.	9/10	May '25
101 Scout	£16,095	1250cc V-twin	120mph	110bhp	40mpg*	Impressive mix of trad' cruiser flair and sporty (ish) credentials. Engaging, amusing, classy.	8/10	Aug '24
FTR1200R Carbon	£16,695	1203cc V-twin	140mph*	123bhp**	38mpg	Stylish, high-quality, sporty retro with ace V-twin. We preferred it with the old 19in wheel, mind.	8/10	Nov '22
KAWASAKI kawasaki.co.uk, 01628 856750 *Bike's* choice: the latest Ninja 1100SX SE is perky, plush and polished – a sublime sports-tourer								
Versys 1100 SE GT	£17,521	1099cc inline 4	144mph	119bhp	40mpg	Gutsy, high-rise, high-spec 'adventure tourer'. Ace pillion bike. Lacks wow factor, but a class act.	8/10	Apr '25
Ninja 1100SX SE	£14,175	1099cc inline 4	149mph	124bhp	41mpg	UK's fave sports-tourer gets new 1100 motor with even more smoothness and sophistication.	9/10	Apr '25
Ninja H2 SX SE	£25,825	998cc inline 4	186mph*	197bhp**	39mpg	Sports-touring exotica. Not perfect, but classy, usable, and that motor… Base H2 SX is £22,825.	8/10	Jun '19
Ninja ZX-10RR	£25,975	998cc inline 4	180mph	189bhp	44mpg	The already-capable ZX-10R with tuned motor and fancy wheels: basically a base for racing.	9/10	Jun '18
Z H2 SE	£19,975	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	The impressive Z H2 (below) with fine semi-active ride. It's the thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Jul '21
Z H2	£17,475	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	Mega blown H2 motor in bespoke naked chassis. Far more road focus than supernaked rivals.	8/10	Oct '20
Z900RS	£11,875	948cc inline 4	143mph	102bhp	51mpg	Z900 in retro clobber. And better for it – dynamic, feel and detail are great. SE (£13k) even better.	8/10	Nov '22
Z900	£9,371	948cc inline 4	145mph*	123bhp**	52mpg**	If you grew up on inline fours, this is ace. Not as punchy as MT-09, but very good and well priced.	7/10	Apr '25
Versys 650	£8,075	649cc twin	115mph*	62bhp*	54mpg*	Twin-cylinder all-rounder is knocking on, but latest extras keep it valid. Fine multi-purpose tool.	8/10	Aug '22
Z650RS	£7,975	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	65mpg**	Spot-on mix of modern Z650's abilities with cool '70s retro vibe. £150 extra for green? Worth it.	8/10	Jan '22
Vulcan S	£7,475	649cc twin	115mph*	61bhp**	63mpg*	Affordable, good-looking, modern cruiser with ER-6 power. Surprising ability, keen price.	8/10	Jan '22
Ninja 650	£7,425	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	70mpg*	Z650 dressed up in ZX-10R costume. Comfy, easy-to-ride, cheery twin for J. Rea wannabes.	9/10	May '17
Z650	£7,175	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp*	70mpg*	Zed is fun, fit, frugal. Nice, but lacks sparkle next to a Hornet, MT-07 or Trident. It's knocking on…	7/10	May '23
Ninja 7 Hybrid	£7,641	451cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	85mpg	World's first hybrid. Frugal,smooth, effortless on leccy power. But also heavy and steady with it.	7/10	Jan '24
ZX-4RR	£8,812	399cc four	130mph*	76bhp**	50mph*	Not A2, but a single-minded screaming race rep. Small, demanding but also fabulous fun.	8/10	Apr '24

Seven-oh-fun

» Husky's 701 Enduro is a *Bike* favourite – two years ago we took one on a 500-mile trip to a beach byway. It's largely a KTM 690 Enduro R with different plastics and paint, but still. Punchy, light and slender, few dual-purpose bikes switch so effortlessly from road to dirt. For 2026 the 701 (like the 690) is updated, with power up to 78bhp, dash modernised to a 4.2in TFT, and new rider aids to keep you upright/sideways (delete as applicable). Price climbs to £10,499 – but then it does have twice the power of Suzuki's £7999 DR-Z4S…

Listings

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BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
KOVE kovemotouk.com *Bike's* choice: surprising 800X rivals the Ténéré as a real dual-purpose tool. Fine thing								
800X Pro	**£8,499**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**81bhp**	**51mpg**	KTM 790-based motor, great chassis, fine spec. Not perfect, but ruddy close – it's superb value.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
510X	**£5,999**	**498cc twin**	**110mph***	**47bhp****	**60mpg***	Impressive spec, decent performance, big tank, attractive price. Credible A2 adventure bike.	**8/10**	**Nov '24**
KTM ktm.co.uk *Bike's* choice: practical, verging on sensible, but also very silly. It's the 890 SMT for us, please								
1390 Super Duke R Evo	**£19,599**	**1350cc V-twin**	**165mph**	**178bhp**	**42mpg**	Mighty fast yet friendly, sharp but safe, and loads of gizmos. Surprisingly usable supernaked.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
1290 Super Duke GT	**£18,999**	**1301cc V-twin**	**159mph**	**158bhp**	**45mpg**	Mad power, sports handling, all the toys and eats miles. Couple of iffy bits, otherwise ace.	**9/10**	**Jan '19**
Super Adventure R	**£18,199**	**1301cc V-twin**	**155mph***	**158bhp****	**44mpg**	Like a rocket-powered 'crosser with cruise, Bluetooth and comfort. Mega… but Multi V4 better	**9/10**	**Nov '23**
990 Duke	**£10,999**	**947cc twin**	**145mph***	**121bhp****	**60mpg****	More mature and finer quality than earlier Dukes, but still loopy. KTM's best naked… but pricey.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
890 SMT	**£12,999**	**889cc twin**	**130mph****	**103bhp***	**63mpg**	Sharper and more engaging than an adventure bike, more practical than a naked. And a bit silly.	**8/10**	**Feb '24**
890 Adventure	**£12,699**	**889cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**63mpg****	The previous 790 with extra bhp, smoother delivery, tweaked chassis, more tech. Very good.	**8/10**	**Jan '21**
690 Enduro R	**£10,399**	**690cc single**	**115mph***	**73bhp****	**60mpg***	Super-clever Duke/Husky 701 lump in long-legged trailie. Pukka, classy, dual-purpose tool.	**8/10**	**Feb '16**
390 Adventure	**£6,599**	**373cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp****	**56mpg**	Chirpy A2-legal adventurer looks like a 1290 (sort of). But it's basically a 390 Duke in wellies.	**8/10**	**Jul '20**
390 Duke	**£5,699**	**373cc single**	**108mph**	**41bhp**	**70mpg***	Revvy, eager motor in agile 125 chassis? Yes. Looks like the 1290 and less toy-like than it was.	**7/10**	**Jun '17**
LANGEN langenmotorcycles.co.uk; 01942 724059 *Bike's* choice: there's one model, which limits choice. Luckily it's amazing								
Two Stroke	**£32,580**	**249cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**74bhp****	**40mpg***	Pricey, yes. But stroker is deliciously engineered, fast, raw. We love it… but £33k is a lot for a 250.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
MASH mashmotorcycles.co.uk; 01264 889012 *Bike's* choice: go for the X-Ride (but budget for new tyres and suspension)								
X-Ride 650 Classic	**£4,999**	**644cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**60mpg***	Ex-Honda Dominator motor in '70s-style trailie. Good quality, keen price, let down by chassis.	**5/10**	**Apr '21**
Five Hundred 400	**£3,899**	**398cc single**	**80mph***	**28bhp****	**70mpg****	French brand, made in China, Honda-based motor. Iffy details, odd name, but cheap and fun.	**6/10**	**Dec '17**
MORBIDELLI morbidelli.co.uk *Bike's* choice: T1002V isn't fancy, but it's capable and remarkable value								
C1002V	**£8799**	**997cc twin**	**120mph***	**94bhp****	**52mpg**	Superb quality, refined big V-twin, huge spec, bargain price. Shame it lacks ground clearance.	**8/10**	**Jul '25**
T1002V	**£8299**	**997cc twin**	**120mph***	**89bhp****	**50mpg**	Like a V-Strom 1050 with more tech but £5k less. Not fancy, but an ace value adventure tourer.	**8/10**	**Aug '25**
MOTO GUZZI uk.motoguzzi.it *Bike's* choice: unique image, sweet ride, classy quality; it's not fast or clever but V85 TT is lovely								
V100 Mandello S	**£16,450**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**108bhp**	**50mpg**	Sports-tourer is classy, comfy, capable, charismatic. Serious alternative to a Honda or BMW.	**9/10**	**Sep '23**
Stelvio	**£14,850**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**113bhp****	**50mpg***	Brilliant V100 (above) in capable, classy, convincing adventure guise. Not a GS, but very good.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
V85 TT	**£12,150**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**50mpg***	Fabulous adventure mix of old-school charm, proper tech, comfort, and a cheerful dynamic.	**9/10**	**May '24**
V85 Strada	**£11,350**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp***	**50mph***	Stripped-back V85 has less tech, fewer fixings, but lighter wheels for sharper handling. Decent.	**8/10**	**May '24**
V7 Special	**£8,900**	**853cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**64bhp****	**63mpg**	Style, ride and badge all spot-on. 850 V-twin isn't as grunty as a Street Twin, but we forgive it.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
MOTO MORINI motomorini.eu *Bike's* choice: X-Cape is temptingly cheap - but we're waiting for the new 3 1/2 Sport to arrive…								
X-Cape	**£5,799**	**649cc twin**	**109mph***	**59bhp****	**49mpg***	Made in China with CFMoto engine. Great spec, good quality, rides well. No Ténéré, but cheap.	**7/10**	**Mar '22**
MV AGUSTA mvagusta.com, 0208 161 8142 *Bike's* choice: Enduro Veloce handles astonishingly well for a bike with a 21in front wheel								
Enduro Veloce	**£17,400**	**931cc inline 3**	**149mph****	**122bhp****	**40mpg***	Fast, accurate, inspiring, surprisingly complete adventurer. But no use on trails. Expensive, too.	**7/10**	**Jan '25**
Superveloce 800	**£17,500**	**798cc inline 3**	**160mph***	**146bhp****	**41mpg**	Super-sporty F3 in semi-retro dress. Fast, sharp, sounds top, looks superb, quite demanding.	**8/10**	**Mar '23**
Dragster 800 RR SCS	**£16,600**	**798cc inline 3**	**150mph***	**138bhp***	**45mpg**	Expensive, yes. But also classy, high-spec, comfy, and refined like no MV before. Impressive.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Brutale 800 RR	**£14,900**	**798cc inline 3**	**153mph****	**138bhp****	**40mpg****	Top engine, nimble, great looks, ridiculous hard ride. Semi-auto clutch version a bit gimmicky.	**6/10**	**Apr '19**
Turismo Veloce R	**£14,000**	**798cc inline 3**	**136mph**	**110bhp****	**48mpg***	Adventure bike? Nah, it's like a high-rise sportsbike. So-so ride, busy dash, but it's good.	**8/10**	**Jan '19**
NORTON nortonmotorcycles.com; 0121 565 4411 *Bike's* choice: Think Norton, think Commando… and it's good to ride, too								
V4SV	**£44,000**	**1200cc V4**	**180mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Not as slick as an M1000RR, expensive. So what? Brit sportsbike is solid, fast, beautiful, unique.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
V4CR	**£42,000**	**1200cc V4**	**175mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Sculpted café racer is modern and old school at the same time. Pricey but effective exotica.	**9/10**	**Oct '23**
Commando 961 SP	**£16,999**	**961cc twin**	**125mph***	**77bhp****	**40mpg***	Traditional pushrod Brit twin for the modern world. Sweet handling, well made, lots of character.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
ROYAL ENFIELD royalenfield.com/uk; 0844 412 8450 *Bike's* choice: Himalayan 450 is a superb mix of performance, quality and price								
Bear 650	**£6,749**	**648cc twin**	**110mph***	**47bhp****	**60mpg***	Splendid Inter' (below) in Scrambler form. Chunky looks, USD forks, longer suspension. Good.	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
Interceptor	**£6,599**	**648cc twin**	**110mph**	**44bhp**	**60mpg**	Charming twin has authentic feel, fine looks and attractive price. Think Indian-made Guzzi V7.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Himalayan 450	**£5,750**	**452cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**78mpg****	Rugged, functional appeal, now with more oomph and improved ride and quality. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
Guerrilla 450	**£4,850**	**452cc single**	**100mph***	**39bhp****	**83mpg**	Roadster version of Himi'. Great engine, otherwise a bit 'meh' – not as 'right' as a Speed 400.	**7/10**	**Feb '25**
Classic 350	**£4,459**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	The hugely successful Meteor dressed up like an old Bullet. Easy-going basic Sunday plodder.	**7/10**	**Aug '22**
Meteor	**£4,059**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	Simple, chirpy character, light handling, nicely made, and super cheap. Fast? No way. Fun? Yes.	**8/10**	**Nov '21**
HNTR 350	**£3,899**	**349cc single**	**75mph***	**20bhp**	**65mpg**	Cheap, charming, steady retro. Sold half a million in two years, so it's doing something right.	**7/10**	**Jun '25**
SUZUKI suzuki-gb.co.uk; 0845 850 8800 *Bike's* choice: V-Strom 800DE is everything a mid-size adventure should be								
Hayabusa	**£17,299**	**1340cc inline 4**	**186mph***	**187bhp****	**42mpg****	There are more powerful bikes. But nothing goes stupid fast with the ease and class of a Busa.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**
V-Strom 1050	**£12,449**	**1037cc V-twin**	**137mph**	**99bhp**	**52mpg**	Loads of gizmos, amazing screen, plush-yet-secure ride, solid motor. It's no GS… but top value.	**8/10**	**Dec '20**
GSX-S1000GX	**£13,799**	**999cc inline 4**	**145mph****	**150bhp***	**45mpg***	The GT (below) in adventure-sports guise. Not perfect, but ace suspension, toys, ride and feel.	**8/10**	**Apr '25**
GSX-S1000GT	**£11,899**	**999cc inline 4**	**155mph***	**150bhp***	**46mpg****	GSX-R oomph, comfort, lots of toys, fine looks. Trad' proper-fast-yet-friendly sports-tourer.	**8/10**	**Apr '25**
Katana	**£11,699**	**999cc inline 4**	**152mph**	**147bhp**	**46mpg**	Superb GSX-S supernaked with sharp '80s-inspired styling. Bold yet usable, and underrated.	**8/10**	**Nov '19**
V-Strom 800DE	**£10,199**	**776cc twin**	**125mph***	**83bhp****	**52mpg**	Gutsy motor, proper comfort, better suspension than rivals, and fine spec list. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Aug '23**

Going Commando

» See those three bikes listed under 'Norton'? Enjoy 'em, because the V4SV, V4CR and Commando 961 won't be in our listings for much longer. Norton is canning its whole line-up ahead of revealing a refreshed range in November. 'As one chapter ends, another begins,' says executive director Richard Arnold. What next? A heavily redesigned and modernised V4 superbike is certain. But beyond the flagship, a more affordable, larger-volume, smaller-capacity (450cc) parallel twin is surely where Indian owners TVS want to head.

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES
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** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
V-Strom 800RE	**£8,899**	**776cc twin**	**125mph***	**83bhp**	**52mpg**	A 19in front makes for a lower, more road-focused V-Strom. Practical, versatile, bit utilitarian.	**8/10**	**Dec '25**
GSX-8TT	**£9,999**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**50mpg***	GSX-8S fundamentals are solid and proven, but retro restyle isn't the most convincing job.	**8/10**	**Oct '25**
GSX-8R	**£8,199**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**52mpg***	Think GSX-R mixed with a commuter. Easy to ride, friendly, but also grunty, agile, plush. Lovely.	**9/10**	**Dec '24**
GSX-8S	**£7,499**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**50mpg***	Usable grunt, secure handling, fine ride, nicely made. Pricier than MT-07 and Hornet, but better.	**9/10**	**Jul '23**
V-Strom 650	**£7,749**	**645cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**60bhp***	**45mpg**	Mid-sized adventure V-twin has been around forever and can do it all, but long in the tooth now.	**7/10**	**Jul '17**
SV650	**£6,749**	**645cc V-twin**	**122mph**	**74bhp**	**50mpg**	Chirpy, cheerful, usable, quick, proven, though Yamaha MT-07 has a bit more zip and charm.	**7/10**	**Apr '19**
DR-Z4SM	**£7,999**	**398cc single**	**90mph***	**37bhp****	**83mpg****	Soft, friendly supermoto doesn't quite hit the mark, with limited remit and hefty price tag.	**6/10**	**Nov '25**
DR-Z4S	**£7,999**	**398cc single**	**90mph***	**37bhp****	**80mpg****	Trusted trailie is back with a cleaner engine and new electronics. Not cheap, but accomplished.	**8/10**	**Aug '25**
TRIUMPH triumphmotorcycles.co.uk *Bike's* choice: the new Tiger Sport 800 is our 2025 Bike of the Year…								
Rocket 3 Storm GT	**£24,395**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Huge motor is amazing, handling is ridiculous, but firm ride and sheer bulk limit use as 'real' GT.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
Rocket 3 Storm R	**£23,695**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Cruiser? Hardly. With a stiff chassis, handling and crazy grunt, the R is a Mad Max supernaked.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
Speed Twin 1200 RS	**£14,695**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**96bhp****	**50mpg**	Part classic thrummer, part wheel-lifting blingy supernaked. Classy, fast, desirable roadster.	**9/10**	**Feb '25**
Scrambler 1200 XE	**£13,295**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**89bhp****	**56mpg**	Easy-going B-lane thrummer is classy, rewarding, sensibly priced. Think retro adventure bike.	**8/10**	**Jan '25**
Speedmaster	**£13,195**	**1200cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp****	**55mpg****	Low-slung Bobber transformed for the US with beach 'bars, shiny bits and pillion perch.	**8/10**	**Sep '18**
Bonneville Bobber	**£13,195**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**77bhp****	**56mpg**	Oodles of grunt, capable chassis, spot-on stance and feel. Perfect blend of modern and retro.	**9/10**	**Jan '22**
Bonneville T120	**£11,995**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**54mpg**	Lolloping grunt, steadfast chassis, top finish. Hasn't Street Twin's agility, but has finer ride.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Tiger 1200 Rally Exp'	**£19,695**	**1160cc inline 3**	**140mph***	**148bhp****	**43mpg**	Globe-trotting Tiger with 30-litre tank, big wheels, towering saddle and imposing presence.	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
Tiger 1200 Rally Pro	**£18,295**	**1160cc inline 3**	**140mph***	**148bhp****	**55mpg****	Lots of power, tech, comfort and class, and they've stopped the vibes, too. Well done, Triumph.	**9/10**	**Aug '24**
Speed Triple RX	**£18,995**	**1160cc inline 3**	**165mph***	**180bhp****	**51mpg****	Limited edition Speed Trip with clip-ons, track-ready stance and electronic steering damper.	**9/10**	**Aug '25**
Speed Triple RS	**£17,495**	**1160cc inline 3**	**165mph***	**180bhp****	**51mpg****	Awesome motor and ace handling. New semi-active suspension gives a much nicer ride, too.	**9/10**	**Jun '25**
Scrambler 900	**£9,795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	The Bonnie platform in laid-back, urban-ready scrambler form. Charming, if a little bit 'meh'.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**
Bonneville T100	**£9,595**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	All the style and easy-going pleasures of the T120. Makes 24bhp less, but is £1900 (!) cheaper.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Speed Twin 900	**£8,795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**64bhp****	**60mpg**	Handsome, pleasing, well-made retro with decent grunt and easy-to-flick chassis. Really good.	**9/10**	**Dec '22**
Tiger 900 Rally Pro	**£14,695**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	High-tech, high-spec adventurer really can go (almost) anywhere. Brisk, smooth, plush, lovely.	**9/10**	**Mar '24**
Tiger 900 GT Pro	**£14,095**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizazz.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
Tiger Sport 800	**£10,995**	**798cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**113bhp****	**58mpg**	Light, fruity, adaptable, comfy, smooth… it even sounds jolly nice. Our Bike of the Year 2025.	**9/10**	**Sep '25**
Street Triple 765 RS	**£11,995**	**765cc inline 3**	**145mph***	**128bhp****	**53mpg****	Best road-going sporty bike Triumph have ever made. Ace. Less-blingy R is great, too.	**9/10**	**Nov '25**
Tiger Sport 660	**£8,995**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**80bhp****	**60mpg****	660 Trident repackaged as a practical high-riding all-rounder. Giant-slaying brilliance.	**8/10**	**Dec '25**
Daytona 660	**£8,595**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**94bhp****	**58mpg****	Like a three-cylinder CBR650R. Fit motor, comfy, but not a sharp as rivals. Missing an edge.	**8/10**	**Dec '24**
Trident 660	**£7,895**	**660cc inline 3**	**129mph**	**75bhp**	**54mpg**	Affordable and friendly like an MT-07, sweet handling like a Street Trip'. Bit stiff, otherwise great.	**9/10**	**May '23**
Speed 400	**£5,245**	**398cc single**	**100mph***	**40bhp****	**80mpg****	A2-legal bike with ample performance, quality and 'proper Triumph' feel. Big seller for a reason…	**9/10**	**Jun '25**
VOGE vogemotorcycles.com; 01257 485222 *Bike's* choice: it's not a premium model, but 900's value is remarkable								
DS900X	**£8,799**	**895cc twin**	**125mph***	**94bhp****	**60mpg***	By Loncin, who make BMW motors. F900GS power, fine ride, staggering spec for the money.	**8/10**	**Jan '25**
DS625X	**£6,199**	**581cc twin**	**115mph***	**63bhp****	**65mpg***	Solid, well-specced mid-sized adventurer with tempting price tag. Few niggles, but promising.	**7/10**	**Nov '25**
YAMAHA yamaha-motor.co.uk; 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: sporty and engaging, yet friendly and fun – MT-09 is a proper device								
MT-10 SP	**£16,620**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mph**	Already amazing MT-10 with electronic suspension. Great, if not obviously better	**9/10**	**May '17**
MT-10	**£12,320**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mpg**	Not as wild as some rivals, but cheaper, easier to ride, and still epic. Thinking rider's supernaked.	**9/10**	**Aug '22**
Niken GT	**£16,420**	**890cc inline 3**	**117mph**	**113bhp****	**45mpg***	Three-wheeler has more front-end grip than anything, fit motor, fine touring ability Ace, but odd.	**8/10**	**Aug '23**
Tracer 9 GT	**£14,354**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**62mpg**	Defining 'mid-size' upright sports-tourer. Superb tech, dynamic, noise, comfort… hard to fault.	**10/10**	**Aug '25**
XSR900 GP	**£12,804**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**50mpg***	If this is the future of retro, sign us up. XSR in '80s fag-packet sportsbike form is a glorious thing.	**9/10**	**Sep '24**
R9	**£12,254**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**50mpg***	Friendly, usable MT-09 motor in a proper, sharp, head-down sportsbike. Comfy? No. Ace? Yes.	**9/10**	**Oct '25**
XSR900	**£11,004**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph**	**107bhp**	**49mpg**	Ace MT-09 reworked into a convincing '80s flat-bar superbike. Cool, fun, sexy, but a bit stiff.	**9/10**	**Nov '22**
MT-09 SP	**£11,810**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**48mpg**	Öhlins shock, classy forks, R1M paint job, brilliant engine. Superb everyday semi-supernaked.	**9/10**	**Nov '25**
MT-09	**£10,110**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**49mpg***	Top triple has new-found handling prowess and tech, but keeps its usable playfulness. Proper.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
Ténéré 700	**£10,404**	**689cc twin**	**120mph***	**72bhp****	**55mpg***	Retakes position as the defining mid-size adventurer. Classy, capable and fun on road or trail.	**9/10**	**Jul '25**
Tracer 7	**£8,804**	**689cc twin**	**125mph***	**70bhp**	**56mpg**	Super-fun MT-07 with practical niceties. The datum for all-rounder value. GT is even better.	**9/10**	**Dec '25**
R7	**£8,920**	**689cc twin**	**130mph***	**72bhp****	**56mpg***	More than a faired MT-07. Lacks a bit of wow but properly sporty, ace in corners, fun, affordable.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
MT-07	**£7,704**	**689cc twin**	**122mph***	**74bhp**	**48mpg**	Polished chassis adds mature edge to the fun and friendliness it's renowned for. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Aug '25**
XSR700	**£7,520**	**689cc twin**	**119mph**	**70bhp**	**49mpg**	MT-07 in period costume. Proof retro looks can work with a modern dynamic. LC paint is great.	**9/10**	**Jun '16**
R3	**£6,652**	**321cc twin**	**102mph***	**41bhp****	**65mpg**	Light, revvy, fun to ride, well finished. Ability and spec fight for title of best A2 sportsbike.	**8/10**	**May '19**
R125	**£5,451**	**125cc single**	**80mph***	**15bhp**	**92mpg**	R1 looks, big bike feel, clever engine. Easy to see why they sell so many to enthusiastic teens.	**8/10**	**May '19**
ZERO zeromotorcycles.com *Bike's* choice: SR/S is good enough to convert stubborn petrolheads								
SR/S Premium	**£20,495**	**electric motor**	**124mph****	**110bhp****	**242mpc**	Fast, torquey, smooth, hi-spec, great to ride. Range and charge time bearable. Price a bit salty.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**

Y-AMT vs YCC-S

» You've read about the Tracer 9 GT+ (p34) with its Y-AMT (Yamaha Automated Manual Transmission) and wonder: 'What's with this new fad for push-button shifting?' Thing is, Yamaha were at it 20 years ago. Launched in 2006, the FJR1300AS was 'the world's first semi-automatic sports-tourer' thanks to YCC-S (Yamaha Chip Controlled Shift). Like Y-AMT it had no clutch lever, with gears changed using up/down triggers on the left bar or via a foot switch. The difference? The FJR wasn't a full auto, as it didn't shift without a rider's input.

[Head to toe]

Sports casual

Comfort meets protection when it comes to the kit **Martin Fitz-Gibbons** uses for blatting about on back roads

DXR BLACKSMITH JACKET £179.99

I tend to shy away from anything too overtly 'stylish', but needed something retro for a launch last year. After trying on several jackets, I bought this. Looks smart, fits well and priced keenly. No vents and thick leather, so even with the thermal liner removed it can get hot in summer. Only AA rated, but shoulder and elbow armour are Level 2. Back protector adds £15.99.

sportsbikeshop.co.uk

ROADSKIN EASYRIDER JEANS £149

The first pair of riding jeans that fit me properly, so I'm still wearing them five years later. Single-layer design made from a blend of 60 per cent denim and 40 per cent Kevlar. The AA safety rating felt a big deal in 2020, but AAA single-layer jeans are common now. They're light, comfy, feel natural on and off the bike, and have Level 2 hip and knee armour.

roadskin.co.uk

SIDI VERTIGO 2 BOOTS £299.99

A few years ago I needed some sports boots in a hurry for a trackday. Lacking the willpower to research the entire market, I bought the same brand of boots I wore when I was 18: Sidi. Their Vertigo 2 has the full suite of 2222 CE scores – top marks across the board. Fit just right and aren't a convoluted faff to fasten, though chunky shin/calf armour can be awkward to fit under jeans legs.

sidiuk.com

> 'Perhaps the best-kept secret in bike kit'

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM SHORROCK

NOLAN X-804 RS ULTRA CARBON £479.99

I adored my X-Lite X-803 for its lightness, comfort and quality, but when it hit six years old it was time to move on. Rebranded under parent company Nolan, this is its ECE 22.06 successor. It's a full-on race lid, silly spoiler and all, but the gorgeous plush liner and excellent ventilation mean it's a delight for everyday and long-distance use too. Only criticism is the faffy visor change.

nevis.uk.com

LS2 SWIFT GLOVES £79.99

Perhaps the best-kept secret in bike kit. The most remarkable thing about these gloves isn't the vented knuckle armour, Superfabric palm slider, pinky-finger bridge or external finger stitching. It's a tag, sewn into the cuff, that reads '2KP'. This means they meet the tougher Level 2 CE glove rating, with superior impact abrasion resistance, plus tear and seam strength. Very few gloves meet Level 2 and no others are so affordable.

ls2helmets.com

[Know it all]

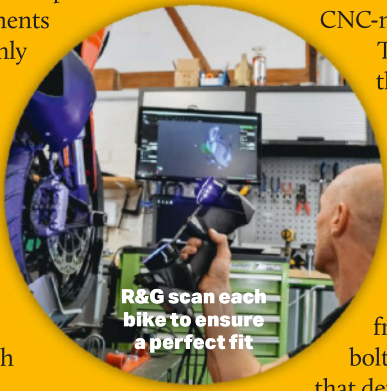
Crash bobbins

Andrew Broadley from market-leading crash protection company R&G explains bung tech

We use high-density polyethylene, an industrial polymer. It has a lovely balance of extreme toughness and low friction, which is perfect for crash protection because it slides well and requires a lot of force to shear it.

Of course, crash bobbins are sacrificial so they're designed to be cheaper to replace than the components they're protecting – mainly the frame, engine and powertrain. We're particularly focused on preventing damage that will stop you riding home, which obviously you can't do if there's an oil leak. Bobbins can protect the bodywork as well, though that's not our main goal.

Mounting positions are determined by the structure of the bike – we're trying to protect the engine and frame as much as possible without making the bobbin stick out too much – if it's too long, it may not be strong enough. Plus, there's the aesthetic side of things to consider. Racers don't particularly care what their protection looks like, but road riders do.


R&G scan each bike to ensure a perfect fit

The best place to mount bobbins is the frame, particularly on the engine mounts – they're hugely strong. If the mounting point isn't where we want the bobbin to be – perhaps it's too close to the rider's knee, for example – we must bridge across two engine mounts with a fabricated steel bracket or CNC-machined block.

The specification of the bolt attached to the bobbin is crucial. It must withstand the force of the impact without breaking, but needs to absorb enough energy to protect the engine and frame. Of course, the bolt won't always bend – that depends on the speed and type of crash – but ultimately it's there to take the hit.

Protectors have their limitations of course, but we try to keep improving their performance by doing crash tests (unlike some companies) using test riders, and applying our extensive racing experience.

» More info: rg-racing.com

[The best tyres for…]

Sustained sportiness

Bridgestone S23 £300

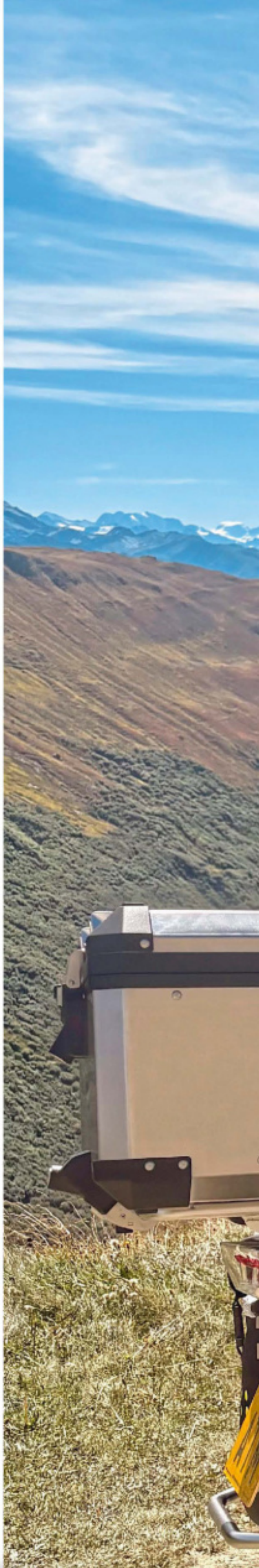
bridgestone.co.uk

» Sometimes you want to crack on without having to worry about shelling out for a new set of tyres every thousand or so miles. Ultra-sticky hoops are ace for balls-out rides, but this set of high-performance street-ready sports tyres perform almost as well in anger, and hold up far better to shoddy conditions and lengthy A-road slogs. I've had a set of Bridgestone S23s on a BMW S1000RR for 3000 miles, and besides a nail stopping play they've been sublime, especially for a 2000-mile European trip. They still allow for letting loose and offer bundles of grip for knee-down antics, but thanks to their deep tread they also offer a cracking amount of feel and confidence in torrential rain. But the best bit is how well they hold up to the abuse. Rain, shine and more than 1000 miles of motorway barely made a dent on the shape, which is remarkable considering the amount of abuse they suffered. For going fast and going the distance, they've worked a treat. ***Carl Stevens***

[**Out & about**]

'Why fly when you can GS?'

Overdue a European blast, **Ben Miller** turned a meeting in Milan into an unforgettable week away on his BMW R1250GS Adventure



In the Swiss Alps, high on the sublime Susten pass, I can't stop smiling. The weather is perfect; blue skies, dry roads, and a balmy 23°C. Emerald lakes sparkle in the afternoon sunshine. Alpine flowers stud the grassy slopes with pops of candy yellow and purple. Birds wheel in the cloudless skies. And wherever I look – ahead, behind, below and on Waze – there are corners; crazed tangles of curves promising a really, really good time.

Politely, the R1250GS Adventure and I skip the queue waiting at the temporary traffic light, leap-frogging a line of loud but slow Lamborghinis and gliding in ahead of a bus to take pole position. Into neutral, hill hold on (like cruise control and the GS's tank-top compartment for peage toll tickets, its handbrake is so useful that, one year into ownership, I'm not sure how I ever managed without one) and I clock another bike filtering into position behind me. Ducati Diavel? Interesting…

Light to green and we're off through the roadworks. When we get clear I watch my mirrors through the first couple of corners, trying to get a read on the V4 Ducati. It doesn't take long. He's glued to my rear wheel, so out of another tight right-hander I pull to one side and wave him through. What follows is perhaps 10 minutes of the purest euphoria.

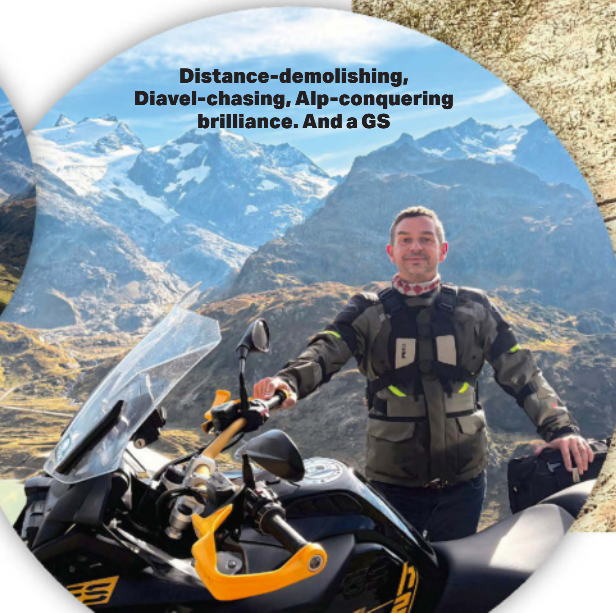
The Diavel's a fantastic pacemaker – smooth, fast and yet clearly still well within himself. The Swiss plate confirms what the riding is telling me: he knows his bike, he knows the road and he knows the score.

Suspension in Dynamic, the GS feels fabulous – as serene here carving corner after corner as it did smashing across France and Germany on motorways. The Adventure's confidence-inspiring handling – wide bars, slim tyres, towering ground clearance – alone is cause for wild celebration. But in cahoots with the ShiftCam 1250 motor (monstrous torque, impeccable manners, filthy soundtrack when you get greedy on the throttle) it's a ridiculously addictive combination, and I'm soon laughing out loud as the Ducati and I carve onwards up the mountainside, the thunderous din of our hard-working engines echoing off ancient rock faces as our boots scuff smooth, warm Swiss blacktop. The Diavel's awesome on corner exit but I can, if I'm really on it, use the taller BMW's ground clearance to claw the time back mid-corner. In doing so I'll hit a PB of 48° of lean to the right, beating my previous best by 3°. And I'll find this out checking my phone in the sunshine outside a chalet café, drinking coffee, eating cake and blissed out at the prospect of not having to be anywhere in particular for another 24 hours. Has it been worth coming? Oh yes.

In truth, I knew planning this stolen adventure had been the right decision the moment I woke up on day one, stomach fluttering with excitement and a frisson of nerves. The plan came together fast when it became clear the window of opportunity to get in a proper ride this year was closing rapidly. I started to worry in late July. By mid-August a panic paced in my guts. Going into winter without the memories of a sun-kissed week on the road is unthinkable, like spacewalking without oxygen. Something had to be done, and those four hours spent gorging on Alpine corners, wildly three-dimensional views and fresh mountain air was 240 minutes of emphatic vindication. And that's important, because wedging a week away on a motorcycle is never easy. Life fills days to the minute, minutes to the second, the atoms of routine so tightly packed as to look inseparable, the bonds that bind them apparently unbreakable.

But they're not. A work event in Milan gave me a piton in the rockface around which to start hanging everything else. Helpfully, it also gave me a

Sights this special help make the winter slog that bit more tolerable



Distance-demolishing, Diavel-chasing, Alp-conquering brilliance. And a GS

> ‘Going into winter without the memories of a sun-kissed week on the road is unthinkable’

This, or a cramped cattle-class seat inside a big tube of strangers' guffs?

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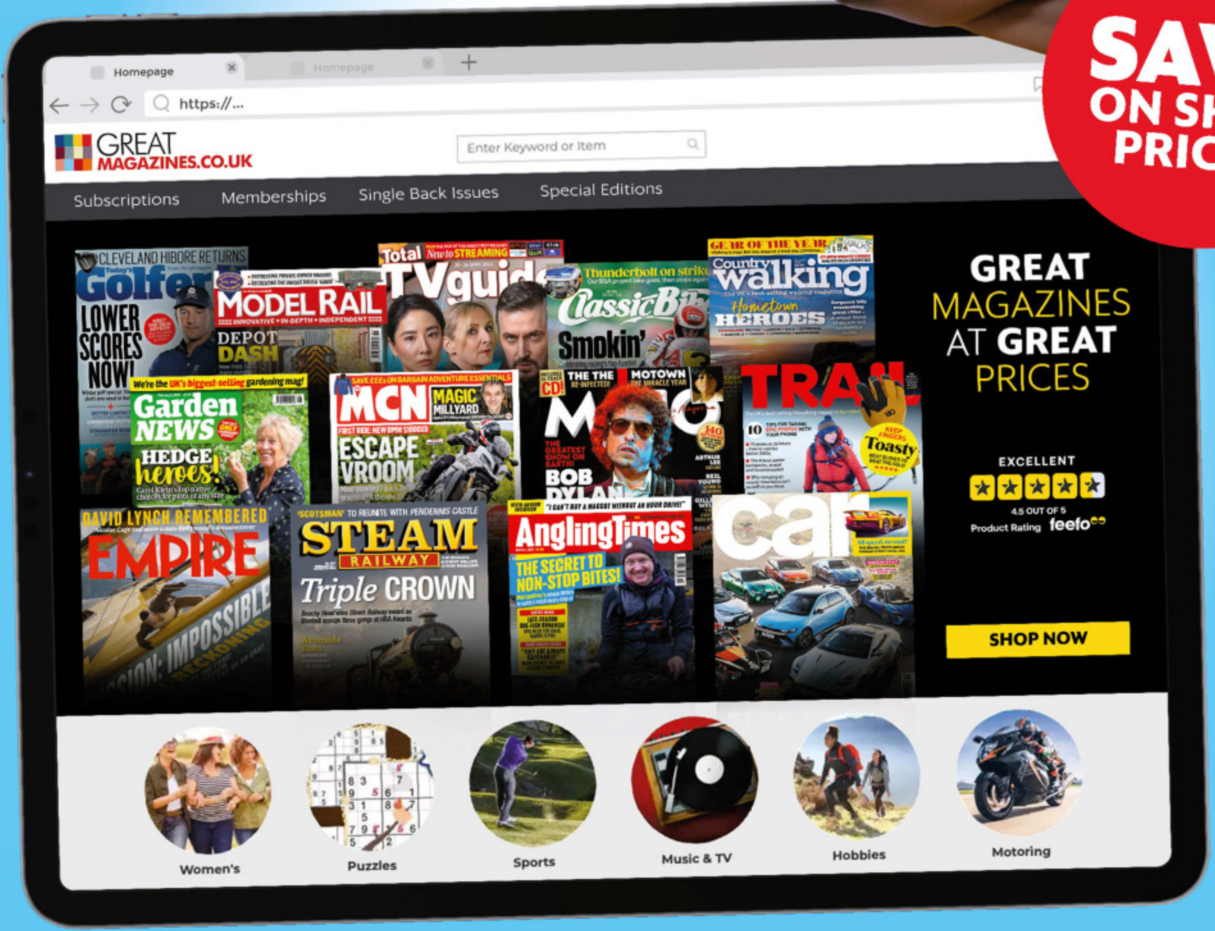
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Mile-high graffiti tagging for middle-aged men on adventure bikes

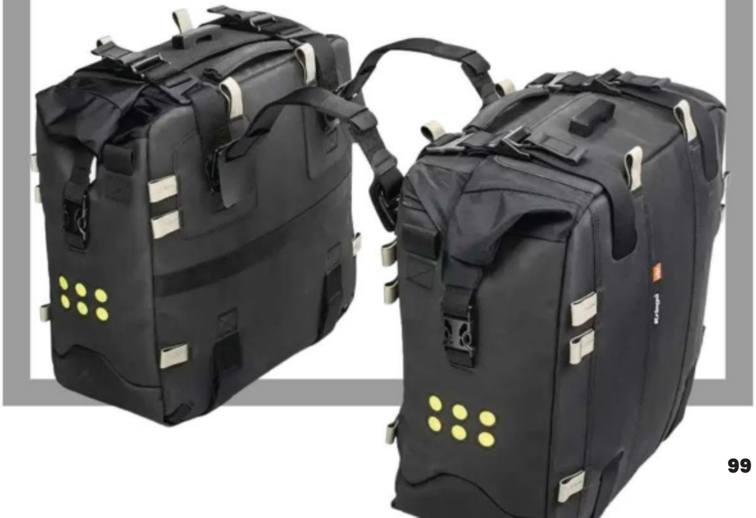
Eurotunnel crossing. Dinner plans just south of Munich provided further structure. To the front of the schedule I bolted the motorway miles required to get me to Bavaria. I knew Andermatt – gateway to a bunch of incredible passes high in the Swiss Alps – was the perfect stopover between Germany and Italy. And if I took three days to get home from Milan, rather than two, I could also take in the Route Napoléon, the first big European road I fell in love with but one I haven't ridden for far too long.

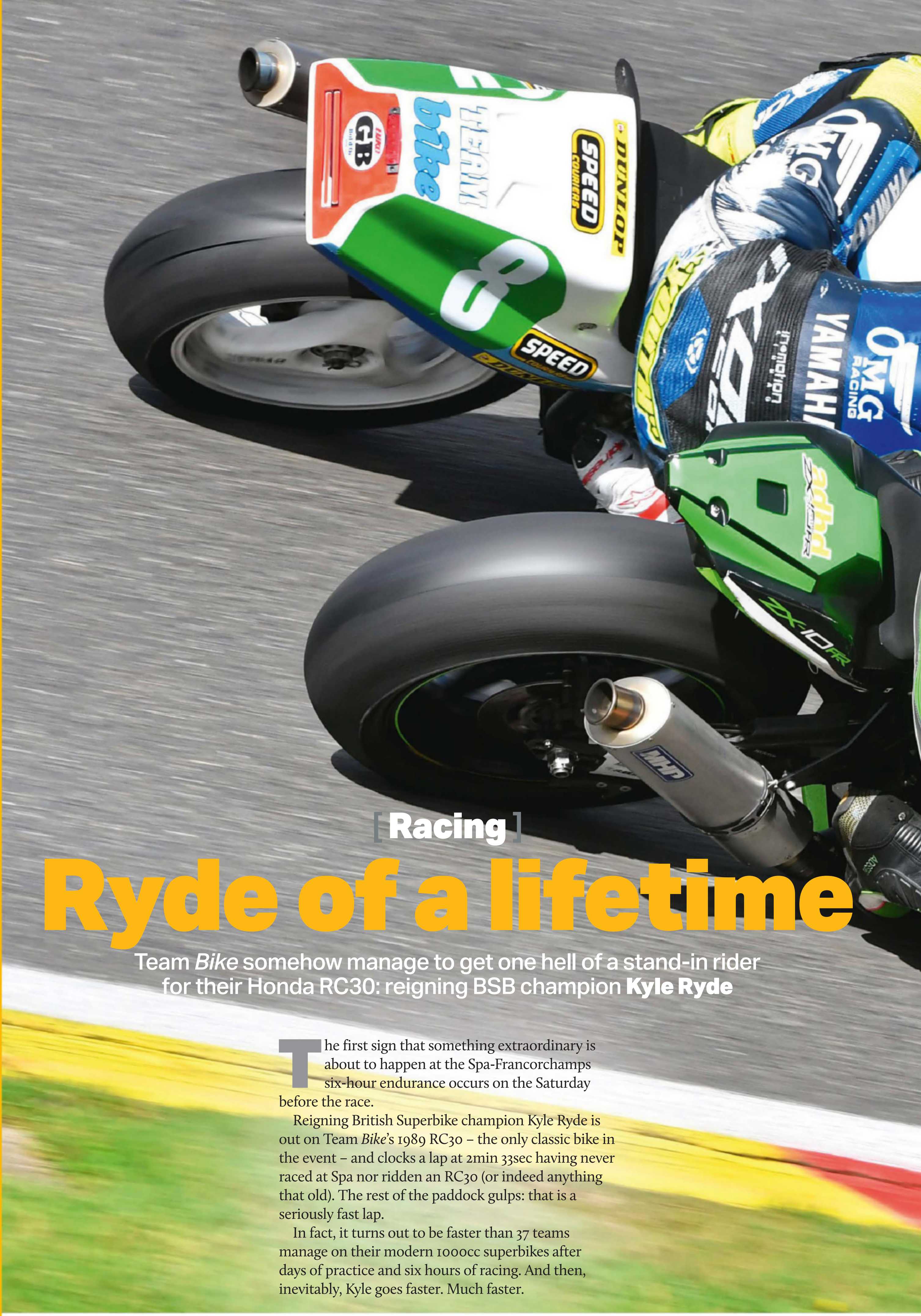
And so one Friday in early September I woke with that elusive giddy buzz, wandered downstairs and started a flat twin rather than a MacBook Air. By 8.30am I was loaded up and gone, scudding south for Folkestone under blue skies. And 454 miles later, after miles of hot filtering in the madness of the M25 at Dartford and an afternoon watching France scroll by on cruise control, I reached Metz. By Saturday evening (a further 318 miles, taking in bits of the Vosges and jumping off the motorway early for some Bavarian back roads) I was drinking dunkel beer in the evening sunshine with an old friend. After the aforementioned Alpine euphoria, a couple of days in Milan for work popped the bubble temporarily. But by Wednesday afternoon I was back at it, sweeping up from the glittering Côte d'Azur and 30°C heat into the foothills of the Alpes-Maritimes and on to an overnight in postcard-pretty Castellane.

A couple of days later I was home, deliriously high on nearly 2453 miles of almost entirely warm, dry and blissful riding. Winter is coming but at least now I am ready. Let it come. Bike

Kriega Overlander-S soft panniers

» Having run heavy, fragile and expensive aluminium panniers on my Yamaha Ténéré 700, I knew I wanted soft panniers (plus a lockable aluminium top box) on the GS. The full set-up, which I bought from Sportsbikeshop, requires two OS-Platforms which bolt to the factory pannier frames (£189), an adapter (£35) to get around the exhaust, and the bags themselves (OS-32 panniers in my case, 32 litres and £279 each; 22s and 38s are also available). Expensive, then. But the system's easy to fit (the frames took perhaps an hour) and highly recommended. The way the bags secure to the frames each morning is fiendishly clever. Buckles pass into the frames and then support their own weight, so you can complete the securing process without holding them up as you do so, and nothing so much as worked slightly loose in nearly 2500 miles, let alone went slack. Waterproof in an absolute deluge coming into Calais, too.





[Racing]

Ryde of a lifetime

Team *Bike* somehow manage to get one hell of a stand-in rider for their Honda RC30: reigning BSB champion **Kyle Ryde**

The first sign that something extraordinary is about to happen at the Spa-Francorchamps six-hour endurance occurs on the Saturday before the race.

Reigning British Superbike champion Kyle Ryde is out on Team *Bike*'s 1989 RC30 – the only classic bike in the event – and clocks a lap at 2min 33sec having never raced at Spa nor ridden an RC30 (or indeed anything that old). The rest of the paddock gulps: that is a seriously fast lap.

In fact, it turns out to be faster than 37 teams manage on their modern 1000cc superbikes after days of practice and six hours of racing. And then, inevitably, Kyle goes faster. Much faster.

97
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Riding round the outside of a race-spec ZX-10R isn't easy. Doing it on a 1989 RC30 is other-worldly...

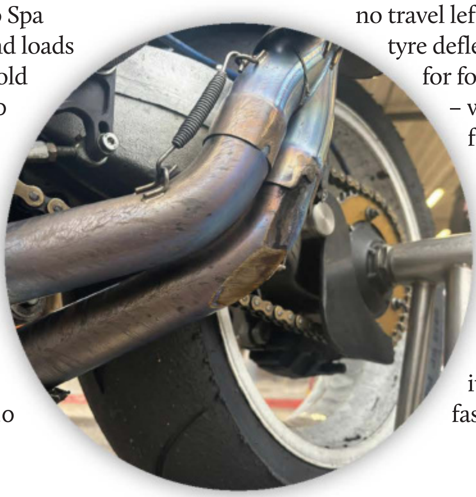
1989 Honda meets 2025 riding style

But how did a British Superbike star end up dicing with M1000RRs on a 36-year-old Honda V4 run by a happy band of amateurs?

'It started out with us wanting to give our usual rider Casey [O'Gorman, the 17-year-old hotshot] a chance to ride Spa on the RC30,' says Team *Bike* boss Ian Martin. 'But unfortunately Casey had to drop out. Someone said Paul Curran [team principal of top BSB outfit OMG Racing] might like to do it, so I asked him and he was keen. Then our second rider dropped out and Paul said he'll ask Kyle. Paul found our third rider too – one of his top mechanics, Jon Lee.'

And suddenly it all got rather serious – for Ian at any rate. 'It was like two worlds colliding,' he says. 'Because BSB was at Assen the following week, Paul brought the whole OMG team with him to Spa – three artics, two massive motorhomes and loads of staff. And there's us with my knackered old converted bus full of piles of crap and RC30 stuff. I did feel a lot of pressure, because obviously I didn't want to miss anything that might cause a crash, and I was the only one checking the bikes.'

Kyle wasn't too bothered about Ian's set-up though. 'The weekend wasn't about the state of Ian's bus,' he says. 'It was about the bike, and I trusted Paul's judgement about that. And he was right – Ian put a great bike together and the RC30 ran faultlessly all weekend. Hats off to him for that.'



A few ground clearance issues...

After those brisk testing laps on Saturday, Kyle and the team were ready for Sunday's qualifying session before the six-hour race. 'The track was damp for most of the session,' says Ian, 'but it was drying out, so the times kept dropping. Each rider had to do three qualifying laps, so we put wets on and made sure they got bankers in. Then Kyle went out.'

By then Ian had adjusted the RC30 to take account of Kyle's riding style. 'It was really interesting because Kyle is so aggressive,' says Ian. 'He said it needed a steering damper because it was flapping about between corners because he was on the throttle so hard. And he was murdering the brakes. He brakes so, so hard.

'He told me the front was bottoming out, leaving no travel left for the corner, and he could feel the tyre deflecting as he went in. Amazing. He asked for four clicks on the compression damping – we've got Maxton internals in there – and fair play to him, that fixed the problem. And that was the only change, which is incredible really.'

Remarkably, Kyle, 28, wasn't horrified by the RC30's ancient performance. In fact, he positively enjoyed it. 'I've never ridden a bike like that before but it didn't feel that slow,' he says. 'I was riding it pretty well [translation: unbelievably fast] and the bike's quite old, so there were

‘Ian put a great bike together and the RC30 ran faultlessly all weekend’

Kyle tearing up Eau Rouge. At one point he was the second-fastest rider on track

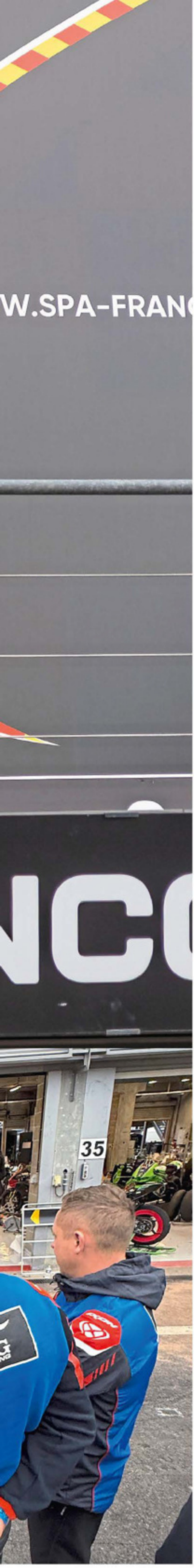
Kyle's set-up feedback was as incredible as his lap times

The only classic bike out there – and still looks the part (we may be biased)

Another trophy for the cabinet. So what that they were in a class of one...

Kyle lining up to overtake another M1000RR exiting Eau Rouge

His smile says it all – Kyle will be back for more



a few issues, but luckily it had a few things you could adjust so we sorted that. But it was only a few clicks on the compression because I didn't want it to affect the other two riders – I'm not that selfish. It just made it a bit safer to ride for me. Overall the racing wasn't too serious and I had great fun.'

Back to qualifying, and unfortunately the track was still too damp for the Dunlop D213GP trackday tyres Team *Bike* usually run. Kyle rushed back in and asked for a wet in the front: 'He then put in a time that was fourth quickest out of 70 riders,' says Ian. 'I couldn't believe it. Then, in the dying minutes, lots of other people put slicks on and we tumbled down to 18th on the grid. Which is still absolutely incredible in that field. If he'd have had a D213GP front he could have qualified in the top 10.'

It's worth mentioning at this point that this wasn't a race full of numpties. Fourteen teams had professional racers, including BSB and TT star Pete Hickman; former BSB, WSB and GP ace Chris Walker; plus loads of French and Belgian hotshots. The rest of the teams – mostly on 1000cc superbikes, with a few 600cc machines thrown in – were made up of varying standards of club racer.

'Kyle didn't want to start because he didn't fancy being in the middle of 70 bikes in the hairpin,' says Ian. 'He didn't want to ruin his BSB title chances by being knocked off. Understandable, but a shame because he would have been away with the front runners. Jonny and Paul are good riders – Jonny was Superteen champion a few years ago, and Paul was a National Superstock front runner. They're quick. It was just that Kyle made them look pedestrian – they were 15 seconds a lap slower than him at the beginning.'

'Like going up Paddock Hill, backwards'

Inevitably, Jonny dropped places in the early laps – twenty 1000s went past him on the main straight on lap one and he eventually ended running in 50th place. Then Kyle went out. 'It was incredible to witness,' says Ian. 'He moved us up about 20 places in 20 minutes and gained a lap on a lot of riders. At one point he did a 2m 29sec lap and was the second-fastest rider on track. Only the Dunlop Test Team [lead rider: Hickman] were faster. Just amazing.'

The other teams couldn't quite believe what was happening either. 'So many people came down to the pits to ask about Kyle and the bike,' says Ian. 'Someone showed me a video of him riding round the outside of a superbike in Kemmel [the fast right-hander after Eau Rouge]. I've never seen anyone overtake there, let alone on a bike that's so much slower than everyone else's.

'The RC30 is just under 130bhp at the back wheel [it's bored out to 840cc, uses FireBlade pistons and is built by GT Performance Engineering – Ed], so he must be giving away almost 100bhp to something like Hickman's M1000RR or Walker's full superbike-spec ZX-10R. And they're all on slicks with modern brakes and electronics and everything. It's pretty funny.'

So, how hard was Kyle trying? 'We probably shouldn't tell Ian this,' says Kyle, chuckling, 'but I was full 100 per cent. I rode that RC30 as hard as I do my superbike in BSB to do the 2:29. I was on the limit for the whole lap.'

The race ebbed and flowed as the riders changed, with Kyle rocketing them up the standings, then the other two riders battling to keep the superbikes at bay. Then after three hours the team dropped down to 58th when a duff front tyre meant Paul had to come in for a wheel change – a relatively long job on an RC30.

'The bike ran perfectly though,' says Ian. 'It started on the button at every pit stop, which was brilliant. And the OMG guys were great – not once did they try to tell me what to do or criticise anything we were doing. I think they were all so pleased to be at a meeting when they didn't have to do any work or be under any pressure.

'It must have been weird for them watching us though. They were telling me what they do at BSB – they have heat cabinets that they put the wheels and tyres in before they go out so the whole lot is 100°C. And because Kyle is so heavy on brakes they get through three front master cylinders per meeting. It's a different world.'

Kyle seemed to like the Team *Bike* world though. 'I'd love to do it again with Ian next year. Spa is by far the best track I've ever ridden and I've done most of them. It's even better than Phillip Island, which is most people's favourite. The changes in elevation, the location, the trees… it's a special place. Imagine going up Paddock Hill at Brands the wrong way and doing it ten times per lap. That kind of gives an idea. You need to do a trackday there, even if it costs a fortune.'

Ian is understandably keen for a repeat performance, too. 'A lot of top riders are prima donnas but Kyle is really down to earth and a lovely guy – exactly what you want for endurance. And it was great to see a bike built in a workshop on a farm being ridden so fast, and Kyle liking it so much. That was a lovely feeling.

'I don't know where we go from here. I suppose I'd better give Márquez a call. Or see if Valentino will come out of retirement…'

'It was great to see a bike built in a workshop on a farm being ridden so fast, and Kyle liking it so much'

With a city at his feet and the key to an epic sports-tourer, Tom still couldn't decide where to get his hair cut

[Ahead of its time]

BMW R1100RS

Brought life back to the boxer, pioneered Telelever and encouraged riders to make themselves comfortable. All hail our 1993 Bike of the Year…

The year 1993 was huge for BMW. The new 'Oilhead' four-valves-per-cylinder R259 boxer engine was an affirmation that a flat twin could still cut it with the faithful – while also luring the reluctant into the realm of Bayerische Motoren Werke. And it worked. Boy did it work.

It wasn't merely the R1100RS's powerplant that departed from staid long-pushrod Munich norms. The chassis, the ergo, the styling were many notches up from the visual clunkiness of the previous big leap – the 1983 K-series.

Where the Ks were blunt and hard to love, the new R was fully formed and lively, vivacious yet reassuringly solid. Much of that was down to the new Telelever front end, engine employed as a stressed member of the chassis, and the proven single-sided Paralever rear drive and suspension from 1987.

The front end was a revelation. Yamaha's GTS1000 appeared the same year. It was heavier than the R1100RS and produced 10 extra horses, but its not-quite-a-true-hub-centre-front-end was vague and lifeless compared to the RS's Telelever set-up – this was a clincher.

The R1100RS could be hustled like few BMWs before. The lithe first-generation R80G/S, even with its scant 50bhp and conventional telescopic forks, was the only Munich product thus far that responded with any noticeable enthusiasm to subtle rider input in turns. The R1100RS was way quicker, more planted, and still as responsive.

The first-gen G/S comparison is no red herring. The R1100RS informed much of what made the subsequent R1100GS such a step change in big trailies when it appeared in 1994. BMW had not quite used the RS as a stalking horse for the GS, but it enabled the factory to read the temperature of the market for the introduction of their dual-purpose boxer a year later.

The Bosch fuel injection system was comparatively flawless compared to woefully snatchier fuelling attempts via electronic fuel injection on other makers' machines later in the decade.

It was a sports-tourer, and the biggest shift it made in riders' mindsets was positing the notion that a motorcycle could be tailored to almost any pilot's comfort. An adjustable seat, screen and handlebar could render the rider-control triangle infinitely suitable for many and varied shapes and statures despite fixed footrests.

And better than all of that – it was a hoot to ride. If you decked the cylinder heads you were as close to going through a hedge as possible. It was forgiving when pushed too hard, steered accurately at any speed, braking was up to scratch, and it looked mighty fine in turquoise with the white seat.

Many key motorcycles emerged in the 1990s, but few were quite so significant for the long-term aims of a single manufacturer as the largely unheralded yet masterly precursor to the deservedly lauded R1100GS and its many subsequent versions. ***Mark Graham***

PHOTOGRAPHY BMW MOTORRAD

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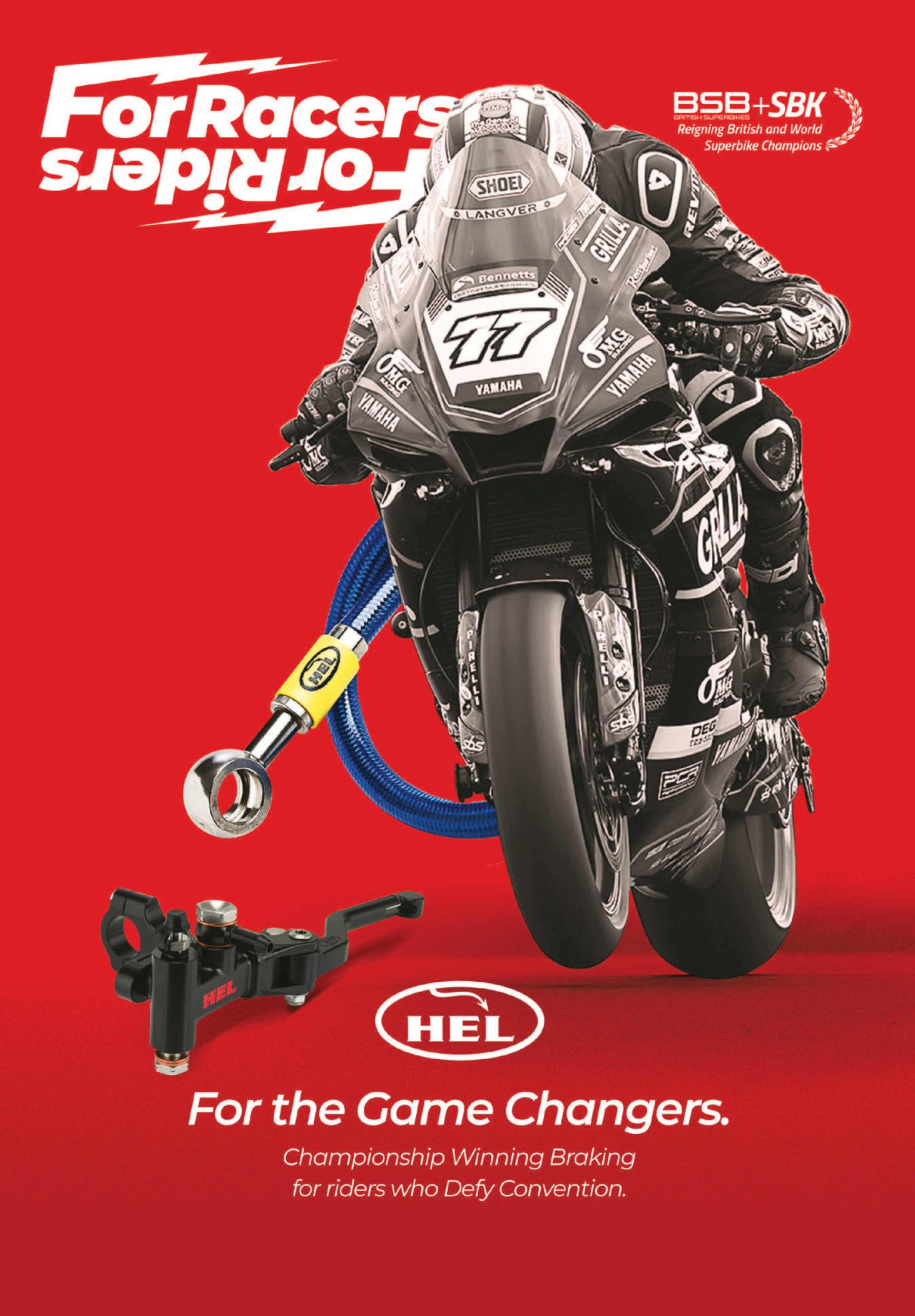

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